

**Communication Control and its Impact on Political Legitimacy in Four Asian Cities**

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PhD Thesis

### Declaration of Authorship

I, Chua Puay Hoe, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.  
Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.



Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_8/8/2020\_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between perceptions of communication control and political legitimacy. Four Asian cities (Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taipei) are compared and analysed as these societies have different levels of governmental influence in the media landscape while having similarities in other aspects. Importantly, the media systems in the societies to be analysed are often ranked vastly different by international civil society organizations. While vastly different in media control policy, these societies are frequently analysed together as they are at similar level of economic development and frequently seen to be of Confucian heritage culture that emphasizes on collectivism and deference to authority.

Political legitimacy is the acceptance of and willingness to obey the government, which ultimately is based on the perception of the populace. Legitimacy can be performance-based (ability to deliver the physical needs) or process-based (sound governance system and procedures that are accepted by the people). Freedom of expression and media freedom would be critical elements in process-based legitimacy. Some studies concluded that a controlled media system would result in a trusting public supportive of the government while others show an inverse relationship between media control and political participation. Increase in political participation have been shown to increase political support and hence political legitimacy. So how does the level of communication control affect legitimacy?

A survey (n=830) was conducted with university students from the four cities and OLS regression models are utilised for analysis. Perception of economic performance predicts support of government, hence supporting the view of performance legitimacy. Perception of the importance of media freedom predicts support of government for Beijing's respondents with those placing less importance to media freedom being more supportive of the government. This suggest that respondents from Beijing have internalised and accepted media control as necessary for the country. Assessment of higher level of freedom speech in general significantly predict higher support for the government in Beijing, Singapore and Taipei. This suggest that communication controls that impact on individuals will lower political support. Data from Hong Kong displays quite different results from other cities, suggesting that there are conflicting values amongst the respondents as Hong Kong undergoes transitions in its political landscape.

This research also conducted focus groups in the four cities. The data shows that third person effect is common in all cities as most respondents think that some media control is needed as "others" may not have the literacy or ability to critique information. Scepticism is also a common theme across the four cities with respondents from Beijing and Singapore being sceptical of media while respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei are sceptical of the government.

This thesis argues that a moderate level of scepticism is beneficial for process legitimacy as scepticism towards the government would push people to monitor the government. Respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei show more willingness to consider contentious policy and think that government cover ups are unlikely with a free press. However, being highly sceptical of media hinders crisis communication and places undue pressure on performance legitimacy. Finally, implications within the context of widespread disinformation and economic slowdown for the cities are discussed.

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## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction

“Get rid of censorship. The Chinese people want freedom.” The New York Times reported protesters in Guangzhou, China carried that banner at a demonstration that was sparked off by excessive censorship in January 2013. Various other news agencies also reported protests against censorship recently (See for example in Wong, 2013 and BBC, 2013a). Given the widespread use of censorship in China, some might expect the Chinese people to have grown accustomed to censorship. In a quantitative analysis of 44 states, Norris and Inglehart (2010) found that the people in states with restrictive media environment tend to be more supportive of their government as there are no opposing messages that the people in pluralistic environments would face. How then can we explain the increasing protests against state censorship in China? Chen and Shi (2001) on the other hand found that the single editorial policy in China had a negative impact on political trust in the post-Tianamen period. In other words, the propaganda policies failed to manipulate people’s political attitude or shore up political support. For the people in societies with limited media freedom, are the perceptions towards political communication control changing?

Restriction of political communication by the government is commonly viewed as unacceptable and against the will of the people. Literature of various fields such as communication, culture and democracy frequently theorised and expound on the importance of freedom of expression in society. In the literature for democracy, many have written on the importance of free speech for citizenship. The unencumbered discussion of public affairs in public sphere is argued to have a positive impact on citizenship. However, the literature on political discussions, according to Conover, Searing and Crewe (2002), is mostly “sustained by political theorists in an empirical vacuum”. In addition, would the process of public discussion that is part of the foundation of democracy also result in positive impact in different governance systems or is it an inculcated value only beneficial to democracy? Other

commonly given rationales are that freedom of expression allows the governed to participate and communicate their needs to the government (Norris, 2000; Scheufele, Shanahan, & Kim, 2002) and it could also act as a counterbalance towards those in power by being able to expose misuse of power (Siegle, Weinstein, & Halperin, 2004; Chowdhury, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2010).

However, within East Asia, media freedom appears to be the exception rather than the norm. Reporters Without Borders (2012a) declared “Censorship On The Rise In Asia” in its 2012 report on press freedom while in Freedom House’s 2012 report on freedom of the press, most Asian countries are classified as “Partly Free” or “Not Free”, with the exceptions of Japan and Taiwan. In the report on internet freedom by Reporters Without Borders (2012b), 10 out of 12 countries listed as “Internet enemies” are from Asia or the Middle East. The most recent study on internet filtering by OpenNet Initiative (2011) also reported a “trend of increasing controls in the context of growing connectivity is emerging in the region as a whole” (p.233).

With increasingly more voices, both outside and within East Asia, calling for media freedom in East Asia, there is thus a need for closer examination of perceptions on political communication control and its impact on governance within the context of East Asia. Keeping in mind that there are countries in East Asia that are authoritarian or of mixed regime, an analytical approach via a liberal democratic lens would thus be incongruous. However, regardless of the type of regime, many would agree that all contemporary states are based on or influenced by the principle of popular sovereignty that requires the consent, explicit or otherwise, of the people to stay in power. Based on this view, popular perceptions on legitimacy of the government would affect the stability and efficacy of governments. Perception of legitimacy is also theorised to increase compliance with government policies and studies have found empirical data supporting the claim (Levi & Sacks, 2009; Tyler &

Huo, 2002). As for contributing factors of legitimacy, “good governance, poverty reduction and provision of civil liberties” (Gilley, 2006, p.518) are some of the factors found to have an impact. Other theorists differentiate contributing factors into input and output factors, with input legitimacy pertaining to judgement of processes in governance and output legitimacy pertaining to judgement of performance such as economic growth. While it may seem that political communication control is only one dimension out of many others in civil liberties or within the process of governance, political communication control may also influence perceptions on other dimensions since information dissemination and opinion formation on other dimensions are affected by political communication control.

Political communication control is not merely about censorship. As pointed out by Gunther and Mughan (2000, p.414), “the nature of the government’s efforts to control the media – sophisticated and efficient, on the one hand, or crude, clumsy, and perhaps counterproductive, on the other – emerges as an important intervening variable” in the examination of media effects. The study of government control of communication environment hence requires the analysis to be done in context and take into considerations the socio-cultural factors so as to better understand how the people perceive the controls. Similarly for legitimacy, as pointed out by Beetham (1991, p.14), “legitimacy for social scientists is always legitimacy-in-context rather than absolutely”.

This chapter will first review the literature for the concept of political legitimacy. Following that, the literature review will discuss the key concepts for the study political communication and civic orientation. Finally, the review will briefly discuss media theories and the impact of the technological changes that will impact on how people discuss politics.

## 1.2 Political Dimension

### 1.2.1 Political legitimacy

In the study of political communication control, the bulk of the literature focuses on how it relates to democracy. Some will also link media freedom to specific elements of democratic process such as accountability and transparency of the societies. The motivation in linking media freedom to the level of democracy can be attributed to the dominant view that democracy is the most accepted form of governance and media freedom is a form of civil liberty that contributes to democracy. However, examining the issue of political communication via the democracy lens is not as straight forward since democracy exists in different variations and frequently comes with an adjective attached to qualify the positions of different thinkers. The problem intensifies when there are still many countries that could not be considered as democratic and attempting to analyse how media freedom impact on the level of democracy would not be meaningful for non-democratic countries.

While political systems may be different, the rationale for this study is that in the contemporary world, regardless of political system, the principle of popular sovereignty is universal (Beetham, 1991a). Popular sovereignty is the principle that the legitimacy of the state is conferred and sustained by the will of the people. The implementation of the principle may fall short for some countries but it would still be necessary for the governments to put up a façade even if they do not fully abide by the principle. Even though not all the case studies included in this study have the practice of universal suffrage, their claim to power and authority is still based on the will of the people. Taking China as an example, China's constitution reflects the claim in Article 2 which states that "All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people" rather than the Communist Party of China. This is not a historical relic but a point that is acknowledged by the Chinese leaders, as affirmed by Wen Jiabao in 2011 with his quote "国之命在人心" (translated as "the fate of the nation lies in the hearts of the people") becoming a catchphrase in China (China Media Project, n.d).



Political legitimacy as conferred by the people would also be valued by political elites across different political systems since it lowers the cost of enforcing compliance and implementation of public policies. Hence, studying the relationship between popular perceptions of legitimacy and political communication control would be of greater relevance to a wider audience than studying the concepts via a democracy emphasis.

The concept of legitimacy, commonly understood as the acceptance and willingness to obey authority, can be studied via the normative or descriptive approach. Beetham (1991a) classes the different approaches as political philosophy and political sociology. From the political philosophy approach, legitimacy is examined normatively from the perspective of political theorists, while the political sociology approach examines legitimacy empirically from the perspective of the people. The politico-sociological view is predominantly influenced by Max Weber whereby he argues that legitimacy is not a moral or normative judgement made by the investigator but an empirical report on the beliefs of the relevant agents concerned. As stated by Weber (1968, p. 263):

*“In general, it should be kept dearly in mind that the basis of every authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige”*

Weber identifies three sources that fuel the beliefs of legitimacy, namely: rational-legal, traditional and charismatic. For rational-legal source, legitimacy is derived from the perception that the government derives its power from established laws. For traditional source, legitimacy is derived with the acceptance of the people that the government is in continuation from ensuing customs and tradition. Lastly, charismatic authority is derived from the perception of extraordinary attributes of the leader.

While Weber has considerably influenced the study on legitimacy, some (Dogan, 1992; Pitkin, 1972) pointed out the inadequacy of stripping the concept into merely sources of belief in contemporary society. Grafstein (1981) deems the approach as “reducing it to routine submission to authority” and the rational-legal source fails to account for factors triggering obedience under conditions of diversity. The many differences in the analysis of communist regimes via Weber’s approach also lead to scholars highlighting that the approach is open to subjective interpretations (e.g. see Gill, 1982 and Rigby, 1982). Scholars also pointed out that beliefs would have to be established by behaviours and indicated that voluntary compliance that is deemed to exhibit beliefs of legitimacy would be difficult to establish in situations whereby there exist structures or apparatus organised to coerce those who refuse to comply.

Even though it appears that there are weaknesses in Weber’s approach, we have to be mindful that these sources are ideal types which Weber had intended as tools for analysis and which he acknowledged that pure types are rare and beliefs normally exist in complex variants, transitions and combinations (Weber, 1946). Legitimacy may be too complex to be simply distilled into pure sources and as pointed out by Huntington (1991), legitimacy can be a “mushy concept that political analysts do well to avoid” (p.46). While the classification foundation established by Weber may have weaknesses, it has led to derivative works that could better suited for the contemporary world.

Beetham (1991a) builds on Weber’s work and argues that the three sources of legitimacy as theorised by Weber are inter-related rather than different sources. In his view, legitimacy consists of three dimensions that are all required to be present for legitimacy to be conferred. According to Beetham, power is legitimate when all three dimensions are met (p. 16):

- “ i) it conforms to established rules*
- ii) the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate; and*
- iii) there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation.”*

From the above, it is apparent that there are correspondences in conceptualization. Both Weber and Beetham emphasized on established or traditional rules. Weber's rational-legal source corresponds with Beetham's justifiability of rules as Weber (1968) states that legal norm may be established by agreement “on grounds of expediency or value-rationality” (p.217), which fundamentally is about justifiability. Lastly, charismatic authority is primarily about the ability to gain the admiration and consent of the subordinate. Beetham also noted that Weber's typology appealed to many scholars because each of Weber's sources contains an element that is required for legitimacy.

Differing from Weber's sources of beliefs, Beetham's multi-dimensional framework allows one to look beyond a “source” and examine closer the different dimensions in regimes that would strengthen or erode the perception of legitimacy. Beetham's approach is still rooted in the perspective of the people, as emphasized by Beetham (1991b, p.42) “Legitimacy is something conferred and confirmed by the actions of relevant subordinates”. Beetham's framework, by breaking the concept down to the three dimensions, allows one to examine how changes in perception of legitimacy might come about in the different dimensions and what the relevant structural or cultural factors are in different dimensions. One could examine whether a new regime conforms to established rules or when examining mutual justification of rules, one could look at whether the justification still exists structurally or whether perceptions of justification has changed. In the final dimension, one can examine the manifestation and perceptions in demonstration of consent. This conceptualisation of

legitimacy is relevant to this study since public communication within the political process is needed for justification of rules and signalling of consent.

As emphasized by Beetham (1991a), consent of the governed is an important factor for legitimacy and in the contemporary world; this pertinence is also demonstrated by how the principle of popular sovereignty is enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Article 21 of the Declaration states that “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government”. Beetham further explained that “one consequence of the universality of the principle of popular sovereignty in the contemporary world is that consent has to be popular consent, even when the rules of the office rest on non-democratic source of authority” (p.131).

Consent is typically seen as being demonstrated via elections but there is a need to examine the manifestation or signalling of consent in other forms since not all countries practise universal suffrage. In societies which do not have the practice of popular election of leaders, what are the alternative forms of demonstration of mass consent? Would it suffice if it is merely a lack of dissent and would a lack of dissent bring about lasting stability? Real consent requires effective choice (Beetham, 1991a). Choosing to give your money to a robber is not consenting to the act when you are to choose either giving up your life or giving him your money. A decision or an agreement gained without effective choice is merely disguised coercion. According to Beetham, “effective choice is guaranteed by the freedoms of expression and association that allow parties and policies to be formed and modified in a manner that reflects a range of public opinion” (p.152). Following this argument, restrictions in the media environment could affect the demonstration of consent and will be probed further in data collection stage.

It would appear that the simplified view of legitimacy as a merely a belief or a virtue would be inadequate. Rather than simply thinking and discussing legitimacy simply as a virtue or quality that someone has as how Merelman (1966) defines as “a quality attributed to a regime by a population”, legitimacy could be analysed as a procedural concept that requires constant appraisal. When viewed as a quality, there is a tendency to view it as a solely dependent on the organisation that possesses it and in a dichotomous manner of either possessing it or not. However the elements of justification and consent that is propounded by Beetham offers support in thinking of legitimacy as a procedural concept. As a procedural concept that exists through interactions in social situations, the processes involved would matter as much as the constitutive attributes. Justification via common beliefs and consent are processes rather than attributes. These processes in turn are dependent on the communication environment of a society as information is disseminated and beliefs are contested amongst the people. Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2006) highlighted that legitimacy when viewed as a social process could explain why inefficiency and inequality in groups could exist and still maintain social stability. Habermas (1996) also pointed out that the process of deliberation and communication can be a legitimating force and serve a “socially integrative function” (p.304) while Huntington (1968) argues that government actions “are legitimate if they represent the outcome of a process of conflict and compromise in which all interest groups have participated” (p.27).

Admittedly, while many have argued normatively the value of political discussions for legitimacy, few have empirical data to show the impact. Searing et al. (2007), through self-reported survey, showed that the “more that citizens discuss topics of public concern in public contexts, the more they are likely to see their government as accountable, attentive and legitimate.” This study however, is conducted in the US and UK, which are democratic in nature. It would be meaningful to examine whether including the people in political

discussions in different governance systems would yield similar impact. The level of political communication control would have an impact on the people's attitude and ability to discuss public issues (legitimation process), thereby providing this study with the theoretical impetus.

Having examined how the perception of legitimacy could be formed procedurally, how then would the acceptance of legitimacy manifest or be measured? There is no widely used instrument or model and a few scholars have proposed measurement models that rely on groups of proxy measures. Gilley (2006) drew upon Beetham's multi-dimensional approach towards legitimacy to build his legitimacy measure. Gilley defined legitimacy as "a state is more legitimate the more that it is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power" (p.500) to reflect the different stakeholders, orientation and degree of legitimacy. While he acknowledged the complexity of the concept, he distilled the perceptions into 3 subtypes, namely "views of legality", "views of justification" and "acts of consent" (p. 502-3). These 3 subtypes were then operationalized into attitude survey measures and actions measures. For example, views of legality would include perception surveys about the judicial system and corruption, views of justification would include surveys of political trust and finally acts of consent included election turnout and tax payments. These are then computed to measure how legitimate states are rather than how an individual perceive legitimacy of a state.

Other than Gilley, others predominantly relied on models that are variations of or closely resemble the input/output legitimacy framework that is proposed by Scharpf (1999). Input legitimacy refers to procedural fairness, participation of the people in policy formulation and transparency while output legitimacy refers to performance assessment of the government. Weatherford's (1992) model is based on multiple factors that can be grouped into two dimensions, namely "judgements of system performance" (output legitimacy) and "personal/citizen traits" (input legitimacy). Tyler (1997) examined legitimacy from a

psychological perspective and identified two models which emphasize on different causal factors. In the resource-based model (output), instrumental factors such as favourability of outcomes and degree of influence over decisions are identified as causal factors. In the identity-based model (input), social status and intergroup relationship between dominant and subordinate are keys to the perception of legitimacy. Tyler highlighted that many had tended to focus on the resource-based model and there should be as much attention for the identity-based factors as when “people feel valued and respected, they defer to group authorities” (p.338).

Using survey data from African societies, Levi, Sacks and Tyler (2009) build upon the psychological approach taken by Tyler (1997; 2006) and distilled the explanatory variables to four factors. These variables can also fit neatly into the categories of input legitimacy (“procedural justice” and “trustworthy government”) and output legitimacy (“government performance” and “administrative competence”). These explanatory variables are then used for the analysis of relationship with willingness to comply with the courts, police and tax department. They found that there is a co-relation between the variables and suggested that “the more trustworthy and fair the government, the more likely its population will develop legitimating beliefs that lead them to accept government’s right to make people obey its laws and regulations” (p.367).

Finally, for the context of this study, it would be timely to examine the concept of legitimacy and its perception within East Asia as the global economy begins to slow. After the Second World War, the legitimacy of governments in developing countries is widely viewed as based on economic growth and the ability to bring about wealth creation to the masses. This is evidenced in China’s fixation on the 8% economic growth rate (Thompson, 2009) and the level of emphasis that the government places on communicating that to the public. Many other developing countries too depend on providing or achieving a certain level

of economic growth so as to justify their rule. However, fast growing economies will eventually slow down and when that happens, regimes which are unable to respond appropriately and in a timely manner will face political instability. As can be seen with China, it “presented 8% gross domestic product (GDP) growth as a threshold below which the country's economy could not fall, if it hoped to maintain social stability” (Rein, 2013). No country in history, however, had been able to sustain this high rate of growth perpetually and when the slowdown eventually begins for China, the government would have to manage unfulfilled expectations and the social problems associated with slow economic growth. As maturing countries face increasing level of unemployment and income disparity, legitimacy that is dependent on economic performance would weaken. Hence it is important to understand legitimacy as a continuous process on which the relationships and expectations between the dominant and the subordinate is formed and communicated.

Legitimacy when viewed as a continuous process rather than as a virtue to be possessed hence would emphasize on the continuous justification between the people and the state. Media and political communication would then play an important role in this continuous process since the political actors involved would need to communicate and justify their decisions. When political communication is limited to state institutions and citizen participation is low, the performance of the government in delivering economic needs will play a greater role in the legitimation process. It would also mean that performance failures will be attributed to the state to a higher degree since policy making is no longer a negotiated outcome that involved the citizens or different communities within a country. There would be no sense of ownership or responsibility for the citizens for any policy. The involvement of citizens in policy formation or the provision of space for political participation could be a legitimizing process for governments. When policy making is conducted transparently and open to citizen participation, there could be a shared sense of responsibility of the outcome



even if the outcome may not meet expectations of the citizens. As Searing et al. (2007) argued, “those who still disagree with public policies may nevertheless accept them because of their satisfaction with having been involved in discussions about these matters (p.588).” Or as pointed out by Habermas (1997, p.46), “consensus and majority rule are compatible only if the latter has an internal relation to the search for truth: public discourse must mediate between reason and will, between the opinion-formation of all and the majoritarian will-formation of the representatives.”

An important factor to consider when analysing the legitimization process is how politics is structured in a country. Saich (2011) highlighted that Chinese “citizens ‘disaggregate’ the state and while they express high levels of satisfaction with the central government, satisfaction declines with each lower level of government”. Singapore’s former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew (2013), made the same remark, noting that the protesters in China generally seek to right their grievances that are committed by corrupted local officials and seek the support of the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing. Hence in the investigation of legitimacy, it would be prudent to examine whether perceptions can be differentiated between particular government office holders and the system itself. In countries with a freer media environment such as Taiwan, the high level of dissenting voices may cause the political office incumbents to appear less than competent but the freedom could also possibly allow the people to think that the system is sound in allowing dissent and grievances to be aired. As pointed out by Scharpf (2009), governments losing at elections for implementing unpopular policies may “not have established the input legitimacy of these policies. But it will have reaffirmed the institutional legitimacy of a system of responsible and democratically accountable government” (p. 189). Norris (2000) in her investigation of media malaise effects too highlight the difference between particular governments and political system and argued that “public support for particular issues, leaders, and governments can be

expected to rise and fall as part of 'normal' politics, without thereby undermining people's deep-rooted faith in the political system.” (p.314)

All things considered, the role of political communication could be an integral mechanism in the legitimation process since both the state and the polity needs information and discursive space to enable the assessment of legitimacy. Whether it is the conformation to laws, mutual justification of beliefs or the display of consent, all these require communication. Governments have always sought to influence the perceptions of the people to strengthen their legitimacy through communication and authoritarian governments throughout history have always sought to control the mass media outlets. However control of the media has never guaranteed control of the people, as evidenced by the revolutions throughout history. In contrast to the study by Norris and Inglehart (2010) which indicated that the people in restrictive media environment are more supportive of the government, it thus presents a puzzle on how control of political communications affect the perception of legitimacy. The different approaches in the treatment of media space that the four societies take in this study could provide insights on how the mechanism of political communication works in the legitimation process. The next section will elaborate on the position this study will take for political communication and political communication control.

### 1.3.1 Political Communication

It is important to clarify that this study focuses on political communication control rather than all forms of communication control. In most if not all societies, there would limitations to free speech. As is commonly highlighted, free speech does not entail the right to shout fire in a packed theatre and cause a stampede. Societies have limitations on communication that adhere to various factors such as morality and responsibility towards public safety. Hence, a definition of political communication would be necessary. As highlighted by McNair (2011, p.3), the phrase “has proved notoriously difficult to define with

any precision” since the two components of the phrase are open to numerous definitions. He defines it as all public forms of communication by, communication addressed to and communication about politicians and related political actors. He further clarifies that his definition excludes interpersonal communication. While McNair’s definition provides much clarity on what political communication encompasses, his definition emphasizes or revolves too much around political actors and official communication. The exclusion of interpersonal communication also neglects the influence of social media which can be both interpersonal and public, and is gaining importance in society.

Taking a wider definition, this study will be guided by the definition offered by Denton and Woodward (1990), political communication is the “discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decisions), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes)” (p.14). In other words, issues or content broadly related to politics and political figures, governance and civil liberties in any form of communication can be included. Mansbridge’s (1999, p.214) concept of “everyday talk” that includes everything “that the public ought to discuss” would fit into this definition as well. This echoes Gilley’s (2006, p.503) argument on legitimacy that “rightfulness is drawn from a shared morality that exists in the *everyday discourse of citizens*” (emphasis added). It will not have to revolve strictly around politicians and can include issues that are not directly linked to politicians but are dependent on the actions of politicians. An example would be the discussion of public health issues such as air quality and soil contamination, which are closely monitored and censored by the Chinese government.

However, issues that most societies impose limitations on such as those related to morality or security issues such as pornography, gambling, illicit drugs or firearms will not be addressed in this study. Neither will this study include issues related to privacy rights or

economic rights such as copyrights. Having highlighted what is the focus, it is also acknowledged that while certain topics can be distinctively excluded (such as pornography), others (such as ethnic hate speech) would require a certain level of subjective judgement.

### 1.3.2 Political communication control

At this point, it is worthwhile to highlight that this study does not make any distinction between the terms “political communication control”, “media control/freedom”, “press control/freedom” and “freedom of expression” as the concepts are very closely related and the proponents and usage of these concepts are essentially advocating the same value. Constitutions of many countries, including the UN Declaration of Human rights (in article 19), also address the concepts freedom of expression and media freedom concurrently. For the use of these terms within this study, it will only concern political communication as elaborated above in 1.3.1.

The control of mass communication to influence public opinion has been done for hundreds of years. The printing press brought along with it various actions and laws in different countries that seek to control the distribution of information and expression. China’s Qin Shi Huang outlawed and burned books while England’s Statute of Anne was also known to be used as a censorship tool other than as a protection of authors’ rights. However as Beetham (1991b, p.183) note, “in stifling any expression of dissent outside accepted party channels, it ensured its emergence with all the more force when it did eventually break out”. This observation made 20 years ago still rings true as demonstrated by the events emerging out of the 2010’s Arab Spring. In the context of China, Chen (2012) argues that the state’s tolerance of small scale localized protests is its way of collecting feedback as well as a pressure valve for which citizens could release the pressure of discontent. Hence, not all protests are treated with the same heavy handed approach as Tiananmen in 1989.

Tyler (2006) highlighted that his studies on legitimacy with the police and court system showed that perception of legitimacy improves when the people personally experience these institutions as exercising their authority fairly. Objective performance assessment by external organisations of these institutions did not have much influence on perception of legitimacy. In the same vein, the people's personal experience with the state as it carries out its authority in censoring communication could possibly have a greater impact on perceptions of legitimacy than reports by organisations such as Reporters Without Borders or Freedom House. These main sources of data (Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders) regarding media freedom use expert surveys to assess the level of control in each country. Reading a report compiled by a foreign organisation that the media in one's country is heavily censored or hearing stories about a reporters' stories being suppressed would be a different experience than when one's personal blog post got mysteriously deleted or certain search terms stop returning results. For the lay person, stories about state censorship could merely be perceived as hearsay until the person experiences it first-hand. Stern and Hassid (2012) noted that less than one percent of journalists in China experienced any form of harsh actions from the state. In the new media environment whereby anyone could be a content producer, the possibility of being censored is higher than in the traditional environment of merely being a passive media consumer. Expression of discontent is part of social interaction and with the advent of the internet, this activity has shifted from the casual coffee shop to the cyberspace for some people. Evanescent remarks in a coffee shop will unlikely garner any attention from the state but the permanence nature of online postings may. A blog post may garner a lawyer's demand or a Weibo post may mysteriously disappear. In addition, even if one is not a content producer, the new media age has also changed how content is consumed. The people are now less reliant on mass media that act as gatekeepers of what one consumes and the individual is able to actively seek out the information that interest them. When certain

terms become unsearchable or webpages inaccessible due to government control, the effect is felt more keenly than when content editors withhold any information. These first-hand experiences will inevitably contribute to one's perception of the authority.

Political communication control however is not limited to overt censorship.

Censorship is merely a single tool in wide ranging arsenal that governments tap on to control what can be discussed. Even within the understanding of censorship, there can be different approaches to carry out the task. At the content producer level, information can be withheld, news stories suppressed, journalists can be pressured not to present some point of views or the state could simply shut down the companies that do not comply. Governments could issue business licenses to only those companies that toe the line, sue those that cross the line for libel or simply ensure that the top management comprised of government officials or people who are willing to toe the line. At the consumer level, distribution channels can be restricted and access controlled. China only allows 20 foreign films a year (BBC, 2012) while Singapore still has a ban on satellite dishes for consumer use. Libel suits or surveillance measures could also change the behaviours of consumers. China's evolving approach towards control of the internet from monitoring of internet cafes prior to 2003, to blocking websites and then implementing the "Golden Shield Project" to automate filtering of content goes to show how authoritarian states would adapt according to the media environment. Both Singapore and China also control content on the internet stealthily by devolving the task to content providers. The practise of making content providers responsible for user generated content allows censorship to be carried out by private companies rather than the state. This involves onerous requirements that make companies err on the side of caution and steer clear of politically sensitive issues. Lastly, if the state could not control the content, it could confuse the people by flooding discussions with misinformation as what China does with the

“Wumaodang” or “50-centers”, anonymous internet commentators paid by the government to sway discussions online (Bandurski, 2011).

The approach taken by the state in the treatment of political communication control should also be factored into the analysis as meta-censorship could affect how the people perceive political communication control. For two of the states with high levels of control in this study, Singapore takes a very different approach as compared to China. The Singapore government makes immense effort in ensuring that the communication control policies do not have a direct impact on the average citizen but are directed at major media outlets and content creators with high visibility. Restrictions and control are subtle in the form of licensing and economic disincentives. Even when one is penalised for crossing the line, they are typically dealt with openly through legal means and in open court in order to portray a sense of righteousness. Whereas for China, many censorship actions could be felt directly by the people. Search terms return non-relevant results in search engines, Sina Weibo posts are deleted regularly and television programmes get pulled from broadcast mid-season without reasonable explanations. Access to foreign media content online is also arduous and many Chinese have to resort to non-legal channels in order to consume them. The perceptions of communication control could be different when states have different approaches in control.

Most studies on media control generally revolve around the perceptions of a very small group of media practitioners or experts (Becker, Vlad, & Nusser, 2007). Measuring the real level of control would be difficult since no government would be willing to share information of this nature to the public. Given also that the approach to control could be very different, an objective measurement would also be problematic. Does one equate 10 deletions of single word with one entire suppressed news story? What about the reporting of half-truths? The 2013 Southern Weekend saga in China that resulted in street protests was not

merely due to censorship but over extreme control. As a former staff commented, the new head of party propaganda “enforced his power to the extreme and without an iota of flexibility, and micromanaged every aspect of media operations” (Xiao, 2013). It is probably impossible to formulate any objective measure of control that is quantifiable and meaningful across different societies. It ultimately boils down to the perception and subjective tolerance of those who are being subjected to the control. While the perceptions of media practitioners are important, the perceptions of the people should be taken into account too. However, the annual studies conducted by Reporters with Borders and Freedom House only surveyed the perceptions of experts and media practitioners. Intuitively, it would appear that people in controlled media environment would trust the media less. Edelman Trust Barometer (2013), however, shows that people trust the media more in countries with more control. Is the higher level of trust due to ignorance of control or indoctrination? Do the people know about the control? If so, how are they taking it? Is it resignation, acquiescence or deference to authority? Why do some try to circumvent the control while others do not? Are the boundaries of control clear to the people? These are questions that have not been examined or answered satisfactorily. Hence this study could contribute to a lacuna in knowledge by surveying media consumers rather than experts. Comparison between the level of control as reported by foreign NGOs and the people’s perception of control could also provide some insights on whether meta-censorship is effective or differentiate the communication control policies that different governments adopt.

Finally, findings from prior studies suggest that media freedom as a value needs to be examined in relation to other values instead of solely on its own. When a survey question is framed as whether the media should be free from government control, 85% of respondents in both China and Hong Kong answered positively. However, in the same survey



(WorldPublicOpinion.org , 2009), when the question on media freedom is framed as whether government has right to prevent media from publishing politically destabilizing materials, China drops significantly lower with 42% agreeing as compared to only 18% agreeing in Hong Kong. Hence this shows that most people think that media freedom is desirable but some are more willing to sacrifice press freedom to preserve political stability than others. This closely relates to how governments in Singapore and China justify their tough control of the media. Both Singapore and China rely on the rhetoric of social harmony and collective interest in justifying why control of the media is necessary. Whereas most people in Hong Kong, who have been through long periods of political stability in spite of a laissez-faire media environment, apparently do buy into the rhetoric that control of the media is necessary for political stability. The split in opinion in China (and likely Singapore) warrant a closer examination on whether those who are willing to sacrifice media freedom for political stability share any similar traits.

Tolerating or accepting that the state has a significant control of the communication space does not mean that the people are ceding agency within or to the system. People from different societies may have different approaches towards responding to disagreeable policies. Protesting and head-on resistance to such disagreeable policies would be what most can identify as the normal approach. Presented with a roadblock, some may attempt to bulldoze over or crash through the roadblock. However, the head-on approach that requires a large sacrifice may not be what everyone or every society may subscribe to. While the epic Tiananmen tank blocking style of resistance might make great a great front page picture, that might no longer be the preferred approach. Some others may just look to circumvent the blocks or scale over the wall. As illustrated by a popular website providing information to Chinese netizens on how to and what to after circumventing the “great firewall of China”.

The website is named “fan qiang hou” (translated as “after scaling over the wall”), giving a sense that some may prefer the circumvention approach rather than championing for change. People’s reaction towards control should thus be viewed with consideration of the systems of power and control within which those tactics emerge (de Certeau, 1984).

#### 1.4 Civic Orientation and Public Sphere

In the examination of political communication control, it is primarily an examination of how conducive the communication environment is for political discussion. That is a structural perspective of the issue. However, focusing merely on how free the media environment is would be ignoring the factors of political culture and individual agency. A free environment offers people the opportunity to participate in the public communication of politics but whether people take the opportunity would also depend on the political culture. Putting a cricket field in a town in USA or UK would have vastly different outcomes in the participation of the sport. As Almond and Verba (1963) pointed out, the “national histories and social structures” would affect the political culture of a society. Different societies would have different expectations of the public and how much one should contribute to political discussions.

What are the duties of the public? The commonly held view in liberal democracy is that one should keep informed of public matters (McCombs & Poindexter, 1983), follow governmental affairs, actively participate in societies (Almond and Verba, 1963), vote, amongst other activities that are part of being engaged in public life. However, is it too much a burden for the individual or a member of the public, to perform all the duties as expected from the liberal democratic view? Just for the task of keeping informed, as Lippman (1927, p. 10) pointed out that the common man “has been saddled with an impossible task and he is asked to practice an unattainable ideal” and he himself confessed that he “cannot find time to

do what is expected ...in the theory of democracy". Ferre et al. (2002) too noted that "to expect citizens to be actively engaged in public life is seen by advocates of this view as, at best, wishful thinking".

Whether viewed normatively as "civic duty" or culturally as "civic culture", these concepts are not universal and are dependent on the society. Even in the USA, whereby perceived by many to have an active citizenry, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) found that "most citizens do not care about most policies and therefore are content to turn over decision-making authority to someone else" (p. i). Hence, if the idea of an active citizenry with a strong civic culture is not readily apparent in a liberal democratic society, there is more reason to examine how political and civic culture differs in the societies being examined in this study. "Asian values" such as "communitarian principles, willingness to forsake personal freedoms for the prosperity and well-being of the community, support for social consensus and harmony, respect for elders and leaders" (Romano, 2010, p.358) have been brought up regularly by politicians and academics to explain the differences in freedom between media environments in Asia and Western societies. Whether it is a valid explanation or not, there is a need to consider the differences in how individuals see themselves as part of society. The differences in expectations of civic duty (in the context of this study, whether it is a duty to keep informed and discuss politics) could likely affect whether or how participation in public discussions impact on perceptions of political legitimacy. When comparing how public discussions affect perception of political legitimacy, Searing et al. (2007) found differences between USA and UK as well as differences between urban and suburban contexts. Hence, this study would take guidance and examine how political culture and individual political attitudes might possibly influence the perceptions of the variables. Specifically for political attitudes, internal political efficacy (self-confidence in ability to understand and participate in political activities) and external political efficacy (belief that the government will respond to

the demands of the people) will be investigated. Authoritarian orientation and survival values would also be taken into account since as pointed out earlier, some are more willing to sacrifice freedom of speech in the name of social stability.

As for the examination of political culture, the focus of this study would be narrowed on a specific aspect of political culture that is relevant to political discussions. Political discussions may take place privately behind closed doors and discussions may take place in the public in full view by others. Theorists, such as Thompson (1995) and Meyrowitz (1985), highlighted that people behave and talk differently in different social contexts. What this study is concerned with is political discussions that take place within the realm of “public”. Habermas (1991) observed that as the rise of periodical press and gathering of private individuals led to the rise of a bourgeois “public sphere” in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Europe. He theorised that “public sphere” is that of a group of “private persons” gathered to discuss matters of “public concern” or “common interest.” Key elements for this arena are that the discussion has to be accessible to all, private interests are not to be admissible in the discussion, statuses of participants are to be “bracketed” and participants are to deliberate as peers. The outcomes would then be public opinion for the common good. By framing the public sphere with a backdrop absencing the state, “the public sphere, in short, is not the state; it is rather the informally mobilized body of nongovernmental discursive opinion that can serve as a counterweight to the state” (Fraser 1990).

Underlying the theory of the public sphere is also the assumption that individuals have an interest to debate or contribute to the opinions formation of public issues. However, do the people share such a conception? Or is the conception of the “public” or “public sphere” similar in different societies? Zhao (2012) compared the Habermasian concept of the public sphere with that in China and concluded that the change in media technologies is “reconstituting China’s social class relations and redefining the nature of China’s post-

revolutionary and post-reform ‘public sphere’ in the twentieth century”(p.161). If the perception of civic duty is different and people are not expected to speak out in public, how would the expectations of political talk in public be different? Political communication control affects the public sphere since it is the control of who and what can be discussed in public. Structurally, the state may restrict or attempt to shape the public sphere but end result would still depend on the political culture that is the performance and reproduction of political actions that people within the structure carry out. Political culture is constitutive of public sphere since acts which conform to the prevailing culture are reproduced in public or contestation of what is acceptable to the political culture has to be done in public in order to effect change. Individuals then take cues from others in public and choose their actions accordingly.

Would the quality of a public sphere then affect how individuals perceive their civic duty or whether they should discuss politics in public? As described by Habermas, the public sphere in Western Europe “emerges” only in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. So as can be seen, it is a cultural phenomenon. Whereas Rawnsley (2003) argue that “in China, the government has sought to fill the void of legitimacy with nationalism (‘patriotism’) as the basis for a new inclusive discourse” (p. 311). Public sphere and public discourse thus depend on production and re-production of actions and norms. How can the quality of a public sphere be analysed? Ferree et al. (2002) and Bennett et al. (2004) distil the concept of public sphere and proposed that the quality of a public sphere can be examined in the dimensions of access, responsiveness and recognition. This study would thus examine how the people think of the public sphere in these dimensions in order to analyse whether the public sphere affects how much people talk about politics.

## 1.5 Media Freedom and New Media Ecology

### 1.5.1 Role of the media in society

The role of the media in society has been extensively researched over the years.

Where humans live together in a place, there is an inherent need to disseminate information and organise. When villages and towns used to be much smaller generations ago, that function was carried out in the public square – an open place where everyone can gather to find out information and make collective decisions. Then as societies develop both in terms of size and complexities, the transmission of information depends less on physical spaces. With the advent of literacy and printing press, that function slowly became mediated by newspapers and then eventually electronic broadcast media such as radio and television. Over the years, scholars begin to examine the role of the media as societies and media ecology changes. From the potent effects hypodermic needle theory proposed in early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the more recent limited effects theory, there is a range of perspectives on how much influence the media has on society. Most of the recent studies have shown that media consumers are not passive recipients of information. They play a more active role of selecting and digesting than the myth of passive recipient who would believe anything in the media. As Thompson (1995) pointed out, “reception of media messages is in any case a relatively independent process that producers cannot completely control (p.118)”.

At the individual level, the effects of the media might not be direct or apparent, social theorists have observed that developments in media have led to changes in social spaces. The advent of “technical media” that allows fixation, reproduction and space-time distancing of ideas has changed how individuals interact with one another (Thompson, 1995; Meyrowitz, 1985). While there is a range of perspectives on how much influence the media has on the individual, there are much lesser disagreements that the media and politics are closely related. As highlighted by Thompson (1995), in the transmission of information and communication, the media plays a part in the production of “symbolic power” and in “the mediated field of

interaction is a field in which relations of power can shift quickly, dramatically and in unpredictable ways” (p. 118). At the same time, the re-ordering of space and time through media, according to Thompson, has resulted in the world seeming like a smaller place. Thompson highlighted 3 trends that are changing the media landscape: consolidation of media institutions into large scale commercial concerns, globalization of communication and development of electronic communication. There is a growing interdependency between societies and that includes how countries are governed.

Much has also been written on media systems and regime types. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s (1956) *Four Theories of the Press* written in the Cold War era laid the foundation that linked different types of media systems to different regimes. Updating the *Four Theories*, Hallin and Mancini (2004) focused only on Western democratic countries and proposed a three model framework. They clarified that the models are “ideal types” and attempting to apply the framework would require substantial modifications, while application to contexts outside of democratic systems would be problematic. From their study, they did find the media systems in many countries to be closely aligned with their political systems and called it “political parallelism”(p.26). However, they also observed that the recent decades, “national differentiation of media systems is clearly diminishing” and there is a convergence of media system types towards the “Liberal Model” that is exemplified by the USA. They concluded that “whether that process of convergence will stop at a certain point or continue until national differentiation becomes irrelevant we cannot yet know.”

In the age of traditional mass media whereby access to communication can be easily restricted and barrier of entry as a content provider is high, one might conclude that political reform is needed before there can be media freedom or convergence towards the “liberal model”. However, in the age of new media, the potential exists for a citizenry to agitate for reforms via expressions and mobilizing online. Barrier of entry may still be high for some

societies but comparatively, communication amongst and to the masses is much more accessible now. One no longer needs a printing press or a broadcast station to reach out to the masses. All that a person needs is a computer with internet connection to potentially be able to communicate with thousands of people. The role of the media in society could thus be evolving as the media ecology develops exceptionally with the internet.

### 1.5.2 New media/ Changing media ecology

In the examination of how (controlled) media affects the society, one also has to consider that the media ecology is not static and constantly undergoes technological changes. The printing press brought about changes to the oral tradition, the telegraph brought about instantaneous communication over large distances, the radio and television allowed easier communication to the masses; these all brought about changes to society in different eras (Hanson, 2008). Meyrowitz (1985) asserted that “the introduction and widespread use of a new medium of communication may restructure a broad range of situations and require new sets of social performances” (p.39). He also suggested that the advent of electronic media in late 20<sup>th</sup> century broke down the social walls and changed social behaviours.

Just as Meyrowitz described how new media merged social situations and audiences to produce new ones, the internet could be seen as producing the same impact now. The media landscape in the recent two decades has been changing rapidly with the advent of computers and the internet. The ease at which information is transmitted and how many aspects of life are associated with the internet that many terms such as “knowledge economy”, “digital age”, “information society”, “digital public sphere” etc. are coined for the current era and analysed (Beniger, 1986; Castells, 2010; Webster, 2007). The advent of social media via the internet has changed how people interact. The “watercooler talk” has now moved to the virtual world for many, sharing gossips and latest updates on Facebook and



Twitter rather than at the water-cooler. The “public square” is now digital bulletin boards or forums. Many have also written about the affordances of the internet that empowers the people and allow for political change. Ranging from the Zapatista rebellion in the 1990’s (Cleaver, 1998) to the multitude of studies that the recent Arab Spring in 2010’s generated (Howard et al., 2011; Khondker, 2011; Allahui & Kuebler, 2011), many scholars have attributed the internet as a key factor in political change (O’Loughlin, 2001; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Chadwick, 2006; Jordan, 1999).

It is not surprising there is so much interest in the effects of the internet with its potential to transcend national borders. In the 1980’s, when Meyrowitz analysed how the television collapsed spaces, any effect was still limited to national boundaries since television broadcast is territorial. However, effects of the internet have the potential to be on a global scale. Practices of legitimacy are being performed to an international audience now. Acts of government that affect perception of legitimacy are performed to an international audience and audiences also see how governments of other countries legitimise their authority. Justification of beliefs could be influenced by both how domestic processes are carried out as well as how foreign countries allow their processes to be carried out.

While the internet has presented the possibility of rendering national borders porous, the process of content creation and distribution still tend to be shaped by geography. Localisation of content for consumption in different regions is still apparent for the internet despite its international reach. The introduction of new communication medium in societies could have different impact within each society as “the process of technological adaptation is one where the introduced technology is adopted to the social processes of the adopting society, and not vice-versa” (Schaniel, 1988). Even with the potential to communicate with anyone in the world, people still tend to participate in virtual forums with fellow users who are more similar to themselves and consume media that they can better identify with. Rather

than thinking that the internet has created a single global media ecology, it may be more appropriate to deem it as creating multiple ecologies with porous borders. Provision of easier access to people does not mean everyone will consume the same content and like every media before the internet, there will be segmentation of audiences.

The adoption of the internet in different societies will take its own distinct course and as highlighted by George (2006), while Singapore and Malaysia shared similar culture and history, the development of politics that is facilitated by the advent of the internet is vastly different. Structurally, the internet would seem to provide similar resources political development in both countries and in fact, the internet adoption rate is faster and higher in Singapore. However, Malaysia experienced a wider and more active political participation via the cyberspace while online politics remains muted for Singapore. Yang's (2009) study of citizen activism online in China argues that the internet reflects the changes in society rather than directly cause the increase in activism. Hence, investigating whether and why people in the societies concerned seek out and use political information online that is created outside of the local mainstream media is an aspect that this study will examine.

Many studies have also investigated how the internet has changed civic engagement. However, most tend to be conducted in Western liberal democratic societies and also tend to assume that the internet everyone has access to is the same. There is little analysis on the different levels of control that different people encounter and how that affects their civic engagement experience and attitude. In the past, authoritarian governments only had to control a small group of media owners or producers and the media experience of the population would be similar. With the internet, that is no longer the case as different people would attempt to access different content and the experience of being censored would be different according to the content. Some within the Chinese government has begun to acknowledge that open communications matters more in the internet era as quoted in the

Washington Post (Denyer, 2013), a report produced by China's People's Daily said that "in the Weibo era, an Internet public opinion crisis cannot be handled by evading and dodging". That report further advised "facing the questions directly, speaking with the facts, convincing people by sincerity is the key to resolve the problem." However, the recently leaked memo "Document No. 9" from the party leadership indicates that the top leaders are still advocating for strict control of the media (Buckley, 2013).

Thompson argues that publicness should be seen as "openness and visibility, of making available and making visible" (p. 236). In the traditional broadcast media environment, the power to make available and visible would be concentrated in the hands of the state and media owners. However, as in the digital age whereby information is readily available, replicated and disseminated by internet users, what is deemed as "public" (and thus open to public discussion) is less in the hands of the state or media owners. Beyond the change in media space that is brought about by the widespread adoption of the internet, various theorists are also examining how different media are being used by the people. Meyrowitz (1985) pointed out that it is "meaningful to ask how the 'media matrix' in a particular society is altered when a new medium is added to it" (p.69). In the digital age, content is no longer confined to a particular medium. Just a few decades ago, there was a clear segregation of content. A television show can only be viewed on the television while a newspaper article can only be read on the newspaper. However, in the recent years, production, distribution and consumption of content are increasingly conducted over multiple platforms or mediums. Digitisation allows content to be easily reformatted and remixed, delivered on multiple platforms and generating instantaneous responses from audiences (Jenkins, 2006; Chadwick, 2011). The user-producer dichotomy in media is increasingly breaking down due to the affordances provided by the internet and media is gradually becoming what people do rather than what people consume.

Communication control in the traditional mass media era exists predominantly at the producer level. Censors can control the decisions of the editors. Editors control what gets printed and what gets printed on the front page. Broadcasters control what gets broadcasted and what gets broadcasted on primetime. This is the agenda-setting and visibility-setting power of the state and media owners. The masses, being regulated, would have limited knowledge or personal experiences of such control while still have the façade of being free to make choices to buy a newspaper or watch a broadcast. However, in the new media age, whereby many can be both producers and consumers, the ordinary person may now experience being directly censored or denied access to content. In addition, the affordance of the internet has already been highlighted for facilitating political participation in many countries and thus the people in these constrictive countries could more likely encounter communication control. Media control can now feel more real and closer to heart. This could change how the people perceive control of communication and how governments implement communication controls.

Technology is deeply implicated in the media ecology and the production of public sphere. However, introducing new technology does not merely introduce a new (public) sphere for interaction. Rather, it transforms the understanding and opportunities that existing spheres provide. Information that people obtain from particular spheres do not circulate solely internally. Information crossover and overlap. People talk about what they read in the papers, share in social media, newspapers report what happens on the internet and on television etc. The key point to note would be that media practices and spaces are not static and has to be taken into account in the analysis of control of political communication by the state and the counter-actions by the people.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The concept of legitimacy can be more germane as compared to the concept of democracy when studying a region with different political systems. Legitimacy depends on the adherence to existing rules, mutual justification of beliefs and consent; and hence is a process that requires continual assessment. These elements of legitimacy are affected by the communications between the governed and the government. As shown by Leeson (2008), he found a positive relationship between media freedom and willingness in political participation. Increased in political participation in turn leads to higher political support (Chang & Jacobson, 2010; Finkel, 1987). However, Norris and Inglehart (2010) in a comparison of media freedom found that confidence in the government is higher in societies with restricted media environments. These studies indicate that the relationship between perceptions of the government and media freedom may not be a simple causal relationship. As Norris and Inglehart added in their analysis, it “cannot be viewed as conclusive proof, since various other factors could conceivably be generating this pattern”(p.194). If it were that simple a relationship of control of information is sufficient for the control of the people, there will not be so many examples of despots being overthrown. Moreover, in an increasingly interconnected world, it is impossible for any government to have total control over the media and information. Importantly, Norris and Inglehart had examined the relationship at the country level and relied on expert surveys for the variable of media freedom. Perceptions of experts and the ordinary person might not be the same. This study hence will examine at the individual level and compare how individuals in different communication environments might possibly have different perceptions.

Almond and Verba (1963) suggested political culture as the link between micro-politics and macro-politics. Communication would naturally be a facilitator or mechanism of that link since culture requires communication and propagation. By examining political communication as a mechanism mediating the actions and attitudes of the people with that of

the political structure, it relieves placing the responsibility solely on either the individual or structure. Lack of political development is not entirely due to lack of agential action, neither can government policies and propaganda be given full credit in controlling the actions and perceptions of the people. Hence the problem of why some regimes with stricter media control have higher levels of support for the government cannot be entirely explained as the lack of dissenting views. Doing so portrays the people as merely sheep that can be herded obediently to anywhere. Authoritarian leaders such as Egypt's Mubarak and Libya's Gaddafi had tight control over their countries' media space and would not have been ousted from power if the people could be herded via the media. The political culture (that requires years/generations of socialisation) of the people too plays a part that no government can transform instantaneously in times of crisis. This is a dimension that needs to be taken into account to avoid the oversimplified assumption of direct causal relationship between media control and changes in perception of the government.

The current state of knowledge on political communication are conducted within liberal democratic contexts which rely on normative arguments on the desirability of a free media and the media that is not tightly controlled. Thus there is value in examining how various concepts critical to media analysis, such as media freedom, political attitudes and political talk are understood in East Asian societies. This thesis hence seeks to examine empirically, in the East Asian context, how different levels of media control affect the perceptions of legitimacy of the government.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 Why Compare

As highlighted by Ciagla (2013) and Pfetsch and Esser (2004), the comparative method has been underutilised in political communication. Generally, studies on political communication examine the practices within specific countries. However, examining countries across a spectrum of communication control levels could allow different understandings to emerge. As highlighted by Hallin and Mancini (2004), comparative analysis of different communication systems is “useful in sorting out relationships between media systems and their social and political settings” (p.4). More importantly, it “makes it possible to notice things we did not notice and therefore had not conceptualized, and it also forces us to clarify the scope and applicability of the concepts we do employ” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.3). In the scarce occasions that the comparative approach is taken, the examination of Asian case studies is even rarer. Taking for example, after Hallin and Mancini’s “Comparing Media Systems” in 2004 which focused on the western world, the pair followed up with “Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World” in 2011 that only allocated space for China as the single case study for the whole of Asia. Whether it is due to language barrier or the lack of scholars specialising in political communication in East Asia, this points to a lacuna that urgently needs to be filled as East Asia becomes more important to global political stability.

As this research examines the perceptions that individuals hold there is a need to examine and elicit the contexts that individuals are situated in. This study is not merely an analysis of behavioural responses whereby an input triggers an output. As highlighted by Thompson (1995, p.12) “if communication is a form of action, then the analysis of

communication must be based, at least in part, on an analysis of action and on an account of its socially contextualized character.”

It is also important to note that context is not static and changes with time. It is particularly important with the media environments of the societies examined as socio-political and technological changes are bringing about rapid changes to the media environments. This is hence also a study of social changes. In the study of social change, Delanty (2012) proposed to investigate it via analysis of the pre-conditions, social mechanisms, processes and trajectories of historical change. He further differentiated social mechanisms into 3 types, those that are transformative, generative and institutionalizing. Media environment could be seen as a social mechanism that could be one of the three types depending on the level of media control. For Meyrowitz (1985), he examined social change via the combination of situationist and media theorist perspectives. Drawing on the situationist tradition that behaviour is shaped by knowledge and expectations in specific social situations, Meyrowitz theorised that new media changes “who knows what about whom” (p.70) in what social situation and thus accepted behaviour in different situations evolves due to changes in the media matrix. From his analysis of the progress from print media to electronic media, he concluded that social situations are less defined by the physical locations as the flow of information changes. In the similar vein for this study, the internet has changed information flows between content producers and content consumers as well as across national boundaries and could possibly affect the relationship between the people and the state. Building on Meyrowitz’s theory, changes due to electronic media could possibly have two stages with the first being the analogue stage which Meyrowitz studied and the current digital stage which further changes the media matrix. Some other theorists such as Almond and Verba (1963), Huntington (1996) Fukuyama (1995) and Inglehart (2000) too



pointed out the importance of culture in shaping the economic and political outcomes of societies.

From all the above, it indicates that context matters in the analysis of changes in society and social changes can rarely, if ever, be explained by a single element. The approach to be taken in this study is not to assume the examined concepts to be values-free or assume equivalence across the societies without taking into account the context. Rather, in examining these concepts, this study will attempt to tease out potential differences in interpretation of the concepts across the case studies through focus group sessions and factor these differences into the analysis. Context in this study will take into account the factors as highlighted by the theorists above and draw on critical realist perspectives (Archer, 1995; De Souza, 2013). Specifically, context will be unpacked into structure (comprising of elements such as political institutions, legal framework, technological affordances, etc.), culture (comprising of political culture, civil society, public sphere etc.) and agency (comprising of individual beliefs and attitudes).

While the intended survey can help highlight differences in individual agency, examination of the structure and culture of the countries via interviews, focus groups and secondary research would offer a more comprehensive picture of the differences in contexts and outcomes. This framework of examining context in terms of structure, culture and agency will be utilised in conjunction with the hypotheses and research questions in the section 2.1. While the hypotheses allow the study to be focused, unpacking context into structure, culture and agency clarifies the differences in context for each of the case study being compared. The social changes (or resistance to change) will be analysed together with the differences in contexts in order to explain the differences in outcomes in each of the case studies.

## 2.2 Justification for the selection of cities

Various media monitoring organisations have rated and ranked many Asian countries unfavourably in terms of media freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2012; Freedom House, 2011). How do the people of countries with different media control practises perceive political communications control? Why are some people aware of but are tolerant towards press control? George (1998) argued that Singapore's controlled “press culture is sustained not just by coercion, but also by consent”. de Burgh’s (2003) interview with Chinese journalists found that some see no contradiction in both being a mouthpiece of the government and representing the interests of the people. Is the demand for media freedom universal or is it a Western value? Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) approach in selection of countries began with political systems (liberal democratic) that are similar. Following their approach of selecting similar political systems would be trying to fit into their models without consideration of political contexts/systems that do not fit closely with the liberal democratic model. This study will instead begin from similar cultural and values system (according to various scholars elaborated below) while allowing the differences in political institutions and media control policies to serve as differences for analysis.

This comparative study will attempt to provide insight and contribute to the discourse on political communication control in the East Asian context by focusing and comparing countries in greater China (namely mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and Singapore. The choice of the four countries would provide examples of different levels of control in media freedom (see Table 2).

Przeworski and Teune (1970) suggested two approaches when selecting case studies for comparison, namely “most similar systems design” and “most different systems design”. By choosing countries that are as similar as possible, the “most similar systems design”

allows the researcher to examine the few dissimilarities between these countries as the likely reason for the difference in outcomes. On the other hand, “most different systems design” focuses on a particular phenomenon and selects cases in many different countries to highlight the intercultural differences. Wirth and Kolb (2004) built on these approaches and suggested modifications such as parallel analysis using both most different and most similar systems design and multi-stage treatment to the case studies.

This study will be guided by Wirth and Kolb’s approach of multi-stage treatment of the case studies. From Table 1, it would be apparent that the choice of the countries allows the study to compare perceptions across a wide spectrum of media control. For internet control, other than China, the other three countries have not been found to practise any restriction on political communication. This could allow comparisons between the countries to be made for different situations. For example, between China and Singapore, this study would explore whether a freer Internet would have a different influence when traditional media is strongly controlled by the government. While between Singapore and Taiwan, the constant would be a free Internet while freedom for traditional media is different. (See Table 3 for paired comparisons.)

Other than the difference in media freedom, the countries are similar in economic development, with the exception of China. China is much larger in terms of population and land mass as compared to the other case studies. The level of development is more diverse for different regions while the other case studies are more homogeneous. Hence, for this study, the selection of study subjects would be limited to urban populations so as to minimise differences due to economic differences. According to data from Brookings Institute (2012), the GDP per capita for the cities are as follows: Beijing (\$20,275), Taipei (\$42,534), Hong Kong (\$48,672) and Singapore (\$62,523). While it appears that there is still a significant difference between Beijing and Singapore in terms of GDP per capita, we have to take into

account that Singapore is a city state and thus the GDP per capita includes all economic activities within the country. Beyond economic measure, based on the Human Development Index, the cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin are on a similar level as Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, the survey in this study will only target university students, further narrowing down the differences since university students are more likely to be from middle class backgrounds.

The intent in targeting university students is due to factors commonly seen as having an influence on political participation. As highlighted by Huntington (1968, p.5), “urbanization, increases in literacy and education, industrialization, mass media expansion” contribute to or extend political consciousness. Studies have also shown that various factors, such as gender, education (Campante & Chor, 2012; Hillygus, 2005) and social economic status (Shields & Goidel, 1997; Verba & Nie, 1972), could affect political participation. Given that the level of urbanization and literacy level is not homogeneous in the countries, a feasible approach would be to select subjects who are of similar backgrounds for comparability. Moreover, the strong link of university students and political change, which as Huntington (1968) noted, “alienated university graduates prepare revolutions” (p. 48), suggests that focusing on this particular group of the populace would be the most meaningful. In sum, by ensuring that research subjects are varsity students from major cities in the four countries; the standard of living, literacy and access to media would be closest matched across the subjects from all the countries.

Importantly for equivalence, the countries comprise of predominantly population and culture of ethnic Han Chinese descent. This could minimise effects that could be due to cultural and ethnicity differences. In education research, these countries are also frequently grouped together as “Confucian heritage cultures” for the purpose of analysis and comparison (e.g. see Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Inglehart and Welzel (2010) constructed a “global cultural

map” using data from the World Values Survey study and these countries are grouped together under the “Confucian” category. Based on “Traditional/Secular Rational” and “Survival/Self-Expression” dichotomies, these countries are “cultural neighbours” that score high on secular-rational and survival values. “Survival values” place higher emphasis on economic and physical security while “self-expression values” give higher priority to participation in decision-making in economic and political life. It should be highlighted that according to Inglehart and Welzel, scoring high on “survival” meant that respondents of these countries valued “self-expression” lesser. Even in this group of predominantly ethnic Chinese societies that are closely clustered together in terms of values, there is a wide spectrum of how free the media systems are. Hence, values of the people would just be a minor explanation of why some societies tolerate curtailments in freedom of expression.

Taking a leaf from Huntington (1968), rather than emphasizing on the types of political system, examining the level of governance as represented by the stability of political institutions could possibly shed light on how legitimacy is perceived in differing communication environments. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2007) ranks all these four cases as moderate risk of political instability with index scores narrowly ranging from 4.0 to 4.8 (out of 10) amongst them. Hence, while the political systems are different ideologically, these four cases can be deemed to be political systems of similar stability. Pye and Pye (1985) too noted how some provinces of China “might have been as successful in modernizing as the competing units of Chinese culture-Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore-have been” (p.64) if they had broken away from China. Literatures in other social sciences too associate these countries together under the label of “East Asian culture”. Together, these demonstrated that the four case studies have very similar features and could be examined as most similar systems.

Lastly, it has to be emphasized that complete equivalence would be impossible as pointed out by Wirth and Kolb (2004). Equivalence would have to be prioritized according to the factors that a study seeks to examine. Hence, a best fit would be the compromise that researchers have to settle for while being aware of the limitations that are present in the selected case studies. The limitations due to the differences in the case studies would then be accounted for in the analysis.

#### Differences in Context

It is acknowledged that the political systems in the case studies are different. Political systems can never be an exact replica for different countries. Democracy in the United Kingdom is different from that of the United States while China's version of authoritarianism is different from that of North Korea. Differences in the systems could then shed further insights. Other than differences in level of political communication control, this study could offer insights with paired countries, highlighting the key differences between two countries for narrower analysis.

## Chapter 3

To meaningfully compare different societies, one has to take into account the different historical trajectories, social and institutional structures and culture of the societies. The next few chapters will thus present an overview of the communication and socio-political landscape of each of the societies to be analysed. Socio-historical events that may have contributed to how people perceive the media as well as key socio-political institutional dimensions will also be highlighted and provide the contexts for comparison and analysis.

### China

Regularly called the “factory” of the world, China’s politics and its stability concern not just the Chinese but also the rest of the world. Many China analysts have commented on how the social compact between the CCP and the Chinese people involves the giving up of civil liberties in exchange for rapid economic growth. Judging by rapid economic development in the last two decades, with GDP per capita growing from US\$363 in 1992 to US\$6091 in 2012 (World Bank, n.d.), the CCP certainly kept its end of the bargain in bringing about wealth to many people in China. However, as per the other side of the social compact, the media environment in China has been described as restrictive by every measure that is available. It is well known that both the internet and mainstream media are highly controlled by the CCP.

#### 3.1 Political History Context

Before delving into China’s media situation, there would be a need to review China’s socio-political situation. After all, media does not operate in vacuum but function within the political and cultural landscape of a society. The CCP also depends heavily on recent history to justify its rule of China. Tracing back to the recent history of about a century as the last Chinese imperial dynasty (Qing dynasty) fell in 1912, China had been through many periods

of upheavals and the notion of a need for political stability has been trumpeted by the Chinese political elites in the recent peaceful decades.

The fall of Qing dynasty led to a fragmentation of China as there was a power vacuum. Various warlords fought to take control of China, but no one had the means to hold on to power. Aside from internal power struggles, China also faced the problem of foreign powers (Western Allies and Japan) carving up and trading parts of China without regards of the Chinese people. The inept responses of the government in Beijing led to the May Fourth Movement, which was mainly a period of student protests led by the universities in Beijing. This tumultuous period and its related student movements remains to this day widely taught in school, reminding people what could happen to China if it is weak and that it is the duty and responsibility of the Chinese people to be united for China. The May Fourth Movement was also the foundation for which the CCP was founded as Marxist ideology spread amongst the student protestors in that period.

For a short period in the 1920s, the CCP joined the Kuo Min Tang (also known as Chinese Nationalist Party, henceforth KMT) as the strategy was to change the KMT from inside and ride on the military success of the KMT in overthrowing the various warlords and reuniting China. However, the death of KMT founder, Sun Yatsen, led to a change in leadership within the KMT and Chiang Kai-shek took over. Chiang did not subscribe to the communism ideology and turned against the CCP. The CCP was expelled and were driven to the western and northern parts of China by the KMT as KMT consolidate power in the southern and eastern parts of China. It was also this period that Mao Zedong established himself as a leader within the CCP and the Soviet Union lost influence within the fledgling CCP.



The civil war between the CCP and the KMT was put on hold in 1937 as the second Sino-Japanese war broke out in that year. Facing a common external enemy of Japan, the KMT and CCP called a truce between them and each focused on fighting the Japanese separately. With the end of the second World War, the two Chinese sides resumed fighting for the control of China. KMT's Chiang Kai-shek eventually lost the fight and retreated to Taiwan island still hoping to return someday. After the KMT fled to Taiwan in 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded and Mao's era of upheaval began. Right off the bat in 1949, redistribution policies were debated and implemented forcefully. Land was confiscated from private owners and redistributed to communes. Some landowners were even executed. Collectivism was eventually implemented throughout the country and land were all re-possessioned by the state. Labour camps were also set up to punish those who transgressed against the party.

In a delusional attempt to leapfrog other industrialised countries, Mao Zedong launched the "Great Leap Forward" in the late 1950's to advance China's position in the world. Communes were established and resources pooled to maximise grain and steel production. However, in the attempt to impress the party leadership, local party leaders implemented measures that led to drastic decrease in food output. Local leaders devoted too much resources into masquerading fake outputs to meet quotas. For example, tools and knives were melted down to make up for iron ore production. Farms devote extraordinary resources into creating a false image of bountiful harvest for visiting leaders. When Mao Zedong or some senior ranking leader made uninformed remarks about how certain processes could be improved or done to increase output, those instructions were carried out without questions. In the end, appearances could only be kept up for so long and ultimately the charade was up and famine resulted. The famine lasted for more than three years and estimates of death ranged from 15 million to 45 million.

The failure of “Great Leap Forward” damaged Mao Zedong’s standing within the party and facing risks of revolt within his party, Mao had to resort to more radical ideas to consolidate his power. Mao then launched “Cultural Revolution” in 1966, encouraging people to be critical of the system and destroy any remnant feudal mind-set. To remove those who undermined him, Mao asserted that bourgeois elements had infiltrated the government and called on youths to counter those elements. The slogan of the era was “to rebel is justified” and Mao’s Red Guards capitalised on that to terrorise the society. The movement might have given some appearance of political participation but essentially was creating factions within the party and society for Mao to divide and conquer. The revolution was also building up a network of informers and carrying out mob justice on anyone who dared to speak out against Mao. The lack of proper judicial and political processes meant abuses of power and personal vendetta were rampant. Intellectuals were persecuted and educated urban youths were sent to rural regions to be “re-educated”. Prior to “Cultural Revolution”, there was also a “Hundred Flowers Campaign” whereby people were encouraged to express their criticism of the party and policies. That too ended gravely for many as Mao purged those who had opposed his policies. These supposed open to criticism/free speech campaigns against imagined enemies of the state did not contribute to building of positive norms and values that are associated to free speech. People instead became more guarded, fearful and distrustful of those outside their close ties since any critical utterance could potentially lead to persecution. Ultimately, the revolution resulted in more abuses of power and further corruption to the system; eventually causing the death of half a million to two million people. Herd instincts and public lynching do not advance any society and the two decades of scarcity had cultivated a generation of Chinese that value personal survival above anything else.

As a communist society, the CCP managed the people through work collectives.

Everyone's life was dictated by the 'danwei' (generic term for work unit) and the CCP pushed out policies through the danwei. Each danwei created their own social infrastructure of work, housing, healthcare and services. People were bounded by their danwei for life and could not freely change employment without permission. Permission was also needed for everyday matters like marriage, travel, housing and childbearing. This allowed the CCP to hold overwhelming power over the people and deter dissent.

Another policy that the CCP implemented during Mao's period to control the people is that of the "Hukou" system (household registration system). The hukou concept is not new to China and has been implemented to varying degrees in the history of China as a tool for population control, economic reasons and mitigate spread of dissent. The CCP however utilises the system to a wider and stricter degree. The system ties people to specific locations (usually their place of birth) and people are not allowed to move without permission out of the location. People moving out of their designated location would have no access to government support such as healthcare, education services and housing. When implemented in the Mao years, hukou status was categorised into agricultural and non-agricultural status. This thus perpetuates the rural and urban divide as much of the country's resources are devoted into urban regions. Be it education services, health services or other social services, urban regions are miles ahead in terms of standard. In the earlier years, urban hukou holders were allocated housing and provided with rations while rural hukou holders had to survive with whatever their own communes could offer at the village level. This led to the majority of the famine deaths during the "Great Leap Forward" to be from the rural agricultural regions.

After the death of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping was politically rehabilitated and brought back to lead the CCP. Henceforth, Deng started the era of "reform and opening" for China that has mostly continued to this day. Deng's economic policies ran against the

ideologies of communism as many aspects involved devolving state production resources to private entities. However, in doing so, he argued that the party needed to let some people get rich first and when the tide rises, all boats rise together. Whatever the ideology, most people are motivated by potential rewards for the work done and transferring modes of production into private hands meant that those who put in more effort would likely be better rewarded, leading to increased production output. In the words of Deng, signalling his preference for pragmatism over ideology, “it doesn’t matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice”. Thus began the retreat of central-planning communism and the (re)emergence of market-driven capitalism in China.

With the opening up of the economy, the political system too began to be scrutinised from both within and outside the party. Prior to the economic reforms, modes of productions were used to control the people. As mentioned previously, “work units” were the most basic organisation of people for which the party could control many aspects of people’s life and hold them hostage for any possible dissent. With the modes of production being decentralised, such direct controls were diminished. Business owners no longer control employees like how “work units” could control their members. The priority of business owners was profit making and not political control. No doubt new business owners were usually party cadres and typically would still abide by party directives. However, when people no longer had to seek permission from their place of employment for everyday matters, they would be more discerning over what the state or the CCP could interfere with in their lives. Coupled with the restart of education after the end of the cultural revolution, more people are politically conscious of the problems within the political system and demands for political reforms started to surface.

Deng Xiaoping made a conscious effort to distance his government from Mao's era and tolerated criticism of policies from Mao's era in order to implement his reforms. Mao, however, was still a symbol of the party and to outright reject Mao and his policies would be detrimental to the party. Mao was the one who had proclaimed the establishment of modern China. The CCP still needed Mao as a symbol to conflate party and state, in order to ensure the longevity of the party. The propaganda that the CCP could rely on was and still is that the government, like any human being, could make mistakes and what is important is the ability to correct themselves. Much of the blame was also diverted to the "gang of four" senior party leaders who had been instrumental for the Cultural Revolution. The four were subsequently removed from power after Mao's death and put on trial for their purported role in the Cultural Revolution. Emerging from the shadows of Mao's, Deng made targeted changes to avert another cult personality scenario in China. Key among which was that Deng ensured that China would be governed by a collective leadership. Even while he was viewed and treated as "the paramount leader" (an informal term rather than an official position) of China, he never occupied the position of the president or secretary general of the party. During his time, the top four positions in China were occupied by four different persons with Deng himself holding only to the position of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. The other key positions - President of the PRC, Premier of the State Council and Secretary General of the CCP were held by others.

The long shadow cast by Mao's devastation also led to another of Deng's reforms. Convinced that no one should be allowed to rule over China indefinitely, Deng implemented the two-term limit rule for which leaders could serve no more than two terms. This limit would serve as a safety mechanism preventing another extended Mao-like upheaval. The term limit however was only legislated for the state position of the President of PRC while party positions of Secretary General and Chairman of the Central Military Commission were

left unwritten. Deng also experimented with direct elections, albeit at very low impact scale, at the village level for the post of village chief. Since then, counties, towns and villages have some form of direct elections for their leaders. The implementation of direct elections however had not been expanded beyond the token small scale experimentation. In fact, over time, these elections have become more controlled as only those who are approved by the party could get on the ballot. There are also media reporting on some elections being corrupted by the local candidates through vote buying. These reports tend to portray the elections as highly susceptible to manipulation and thus elections should not be the way forward for high level positions in the country. Due to the highly managed nature of these elections, these elections usually do not garner much attention from the people. In the last few decades, there were a few episodes of independent candidates who campaigned for positions without the blessings of the CCP but were typically put to rest with harassments and threats by the CCP.

Even though Deng Xiaoping gradually implemented political reforms after he took power, the political reforms were not progressing as fast as the youths in China had hoped for. Students were getting restless and despondent about employment prospects in the changing economy in the 1980's. Jobs were no longer guaranteed by the state and newly implemented economic reforms led to rampant nepotism and cronyism, shutting out those without connections. Inspired by western educated returning Chinese scholars and democratization movements in other parts of the world, Chinese students began agitating for liberalization in politics, stronger rule of law, democracy and other democracy related ideas. Protests started happening in a few cities in mid-1980's and got increasing larger until April of 1989 whereby the death of Hu Yaobang (former General Secretary of CCP who had to resign for being tolerant towards these protests) sparked off sustained protests at Tiananmen Square. The student movement spread to many other Chinese cities and the CCP declared

martial law to rein in the movement. Eventually the protests culminated in the Tiananmen massacre on 4<sup>th</sup> June as the CCP cracked down on student protests rather than give in to the demands of the students. This critical point in history has since been buried and obscured by the CCP lest the movement inspire the younger generation. Be it history books or the internet within China, the tragedy has been scrubbed clean. Long-time Beijing residents however still remember the tragedy but are mostly reluctant to publicly express their opinions about it.

Jiang Zemin rose to power in the aftermath of the Tiananmen student protests. Jiang succeeded Zhao Ziyang as Secretary General of the CCP as Zhao was blamed for supporting the student protests. Deng Xiaoping's tolerance toward political liberalization came to a head as his allies were removed from leadership positions as other CCP factions pinned the blame on Deng's allies. Deng Xiaoping's push for collective leadership through the experiment of having different people occupying the top state positions and party positions was abandoned as Deng faded into the background. Jiang Zemin eventually occupied all the important positions of power after taking over as the leadership of China. Jiang might not have been as supportive of Deng's political reforms, but Jiang continued Deng's "opening up" policy and built on Deng's economic reforms. Jiang supported the integration of China's economy with the global market with his "go out" strategy in 1999 which encouraged state owned enterprises (SOE) to invest and undertake overseas projects. Jiang's economic policies culminated with China's entry into the World Trade Organisation in 2001.

Jiang Zemin introduced the "Three Represents" theory/thought in 2001 that was his legacy contribution to the CCP ideology. The main point of the theory was that he proposed that the party allowed inclusion of people from the private sector, as there are more people in the private sector as China progresses. This breakthrough essentially brings capitalism into China's political mainstream. Prior to this, with the exclusion of private sector from CCP

membership, it could still be seen by some that the privatisation of state-owned assets were merely the CCP's approach in economic progression and at its heart the party's ideology was still about representing the man on the street. However, when capital owners were being co-opted into party ranks, the contradictions with communist ideology were getting more jarring. Thereby, there were pockets of resistance when Jiang implemented the policy.

In 2002, Jiang Zemin handed over the position of the General Secretary of the CCP to Hu Jintao. While the second transfer of power was smooth, Jiang held on to the position of Chairman of the Central Military Commission for another two years before handing over to Hu. Mao Zedong coined the phrase "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and his next two successors (Deng and Jiang) too subscribed to the dogma as demonstrated by how they held on to the control of the military in order to control the CCP. Hu Jintao basically carried on the economic growth policy and did not rock the boat. Many see it as a sort of maintenance era with Hu mainly emphasizing on scientific processes in policies and development. Hu's ten year term was seen as ruling by consensus and marked by continued high economic growth despite global financial crises. The 2008 Beijing Olympics was seen as China's debutante party for which China exhibited its shiny new buildings, efficient system and renowned ability in rallying its people to work for a common cause. This event was as much for the domestic audience as it is for foreigners as it contributed to CCP's efforts in building national pride.

In 2012, with the third transition of power happening smoothly and Hu Jintao handing over every position without delay unlike what Jiang did with military power, some analysts comment that this augurs well for the institutionalization of leadership transition in China. Hu Jintao was Vice-President during Jiang Zeming's second term before taking over. Xi Jinping was Vice-president during Hu Jintao's second term before taking over. The expectation was



that stable and predictable power transfer is going to be the norm for China going forward. Xi Jinping, however, had his cards close to his heart until he ascended to the top.

Many news reports and analysts have since described Xi Jinping as the only “strongman” leader to have emerged in China after Mao Zedong. Deng Xiaoping had to juggle the support of other party elders in the post Mao period, Jiang Zemin had to lean on Deng’s clout to solidify his standing while Hu Jintao was deemed to have governed under the shadow of Jiang. Since taking over, Xi began taking charge of every major aspects of the country and formed multiple committees to which he chaired. The Economist (2016) even dubbed Xi as the “Chairman of everything”. Premier Li Keqiang was effectively side-lined and no obvious designated leader was appointed. Xi Jinping’s power consolidation culminated in the controversial removal of the two-term limit for presidency in 2018. It was controversial for the obvious reason that Xi could now hold on to power beyond the usual 10 years that his predecessors had served for. The justification for the removal was that state position should have alignment with party position since the corresponding position of secretary general does not have a term limit. Some Chinese public intellectuals had voiced concerns about the change but the rubber stamping National People’s Congress passed the law with just two objections out of 2964 votes.

The lack of transparency of the CCP leads to much speculation about the inner workings of the upper echelons in the CCP. All through the history of CCP, there are frequent rumours about power struggles amongst the different factions in CCP. Even for the current leadership, despite Xi Jinping having “consolidated” his power within the party with his extensive anti-corruption drive, rumours of members who are aligned with Jiang Zemin working to oust Xi Jinping would still surface from time to time. The opaque nature of politics in China has led to “tea-leaves reading” in policy directions and leadership

transitions. People know that negotiations, discussions and power struggles happen in Zhongnanhai (CCP's headquarters) but what really happen behind closed doors can never be properly verified. Commentaries, which page a story is in, what terms are used or emphasized, who stands where in a group picture become tea-leaves for which political pundits and the man on the street use to interpret what is happening behind the scene in Chinese politics. However, it should be pointed out that while Western politics might be significantly less opaque, they are no less unpredictable and can be as foggy as politics in China. It is just that the media professionals in the West are usually the ones doing the interpretation, analysis and guessing as the media professionals have more leeway for interpretation. Most Chinese citizens who pay attention to politics know that the domestic media are tightly controlled by the party and have little room to deviate from official sources, so the people have to carry out their own interpretation.

In the process of consolidation of power, Xi Jinping has also demonstrated awareness for the need of popular support in this modern media-saturated age. Deviating from preceding leaders, Xi through various media channels attempt to be more personable to the public by softening his image. Besides the usual handshaking and "leader looking at things" official photos, there are stories and images of Xi doing everyday matters like queuing for food and kicking a ball around. There are also Some Chinese media also began to use the nickname of "Xi-dada" (loosely translated as "Big daddy Xi" in Chinese dialect) to be more relatable and folksier. Although the overuse of the nickname resulted in some push back and restrain (Wong 2016).

The only other recent leader who had portrayed a more personable persona was Wen Jiabao as he presented himself as a caring grandfather-like person. Wen was regularly referred to as Grandpa Wen in the media. Softening his public image was not enough for Xi

as the CCP apparatus built a personality cult around Xi. Xi Jinping even enshrined himself into the CCP constitution in 2017 in the form of “Xi Jinping Thought”, making him the second leader to make such a move while still in office since Mao Zedong. Subsequently, the CCP rolled out the “Xuexi Qiangguo” mobile app for members to encourage self-learning. The name of the app is a play on words which also could mean “learning from Xi to strengthen the country”. Party members have to complete tasks such as reading or articles, viewing of videos and taking of quizzes related to party related topics and “Xi Jinping Thought”. While there are small incentives (accumulate points to exchange for small rewards) to engage with the app, the main push to use the app is because party cell leaders require their members to acquire a minimal number of points periodically.

Xi Jinping’s inclination for tighter controls also extend to the private sector. In recent years, there are increasing demands that companies based in China have to have party branches and more companies are required to allocate boardroom seat for party members. (Tai 2018). This thus presents another about turn in ideology and governance in China. The years of economic reforms and allowing economic policies to follow the needs of the market appear to come to a head. Can enterprises in China be truly private, or do they pursue aims other than profit making? The controversies involving telecommunications company, Huawei, demonstrate how the interconnectedness of private enterprises and the CCP has created mistrust and problems for China-origins companies.

Xi Jinping’s government takes a stricter view and control over propaganda and ideology education. Since coming into power, journalists (both local and foreign) in China have lamented that the industry has seen stricter controls. Xi is not subtle about the CCP having control over the media industry in China and even said that media practitioners must be “surnamed” after the party. Therefore, he pointedly indicated that media is an offspring of

the party and thus must support the objectives of the party (rather than the country).

Educational institutes are also closely monitored to ensure that educators adhere strictly to party lines without question. For the CCP, reforms are restricted to certain aspects of the economy so as to tap on to the global market and resources of the world. Politics and ideology will always stay under the control of the party and support the party.

China has now grown to become the second biggest economy in the world and is slated to overtake USA in 15 to 40 years' time, according to different forecasters. While China still touts its rise as "peaceful", it is without a doubt that it is has also been flexing its strength and extending its influence beyond its borders. Xi Jinping's "belt and road initiative" has various countries falling in line to be a part of it lest they are shut out of a lucrative trade and investment network. Most countries refuse to admonish China even when China has detained thousands of Muslims in the Xinjiang region. The economic and diplomatic clout that China wields now contributes to the narrative CCP peddles at home. China has risen from its lowest point a century ago. China no longer bows to foreign powers. Instead other countries revere China and according to CCP's narrative, only the CCP can keep China on this path of progress.

In one generation or so, China has gone from being one of the poorest countries that suffers from famine to the second biggest economy in the world that is buying up companies all over the world. What we have now is a generation of youths born after 1980 growing up accustomed to high economic growth. For many of them, economic security and stability are taken for granted since they had only known economic growth. For them, it is easier to feel proud about the government when most of what they see and experience are relatively positive. Whereas their parents grew up in the tumultuous Mao era whereby fears of starvation and senseless persecutions were etched on their minds. For the older generation,

stability and progress are paramount. And the progress they have experienced can be described as leaps and bounds. Modern amenities like indoor running water, sanitation, air-conditioning and white goods ownership only became common after Deng's reforms. Much of CCP's legitimacy thus stems from its ability to keep the country growing and keeping the people proud of what China has achieved in such a short time. Many Chinese people thus bought into the argument that if under CCP's authoritarian system could bring about an economy that surpassed many other democratic countries then there is nothing wrong with the system. For many Chinese, why is there a need to vote for their leader when the existing system produces leaders that brought about wealth for so many?

The CCP might term its system as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (coined by Deng Xiaoping for his economic reforms), the reality is that it is in many aspects a capitalistic society with short leash held by an authoritarian government. Many aspects of China's economy essentially function according to capitalistic rules with a competitive private sector that is profit driven. Unions are weak and companies demand that workers put in long hours. The CCP government has also progressively implemented market reforms that integrate China's economy and financial system with the rest of the world. However, in spite of market reforms, the characteristic of an authoritarian system means that the rule of law is usually weak, and for China the CCP dictates the outcome in many situations. Market rules function until the party decides otherwise. The CCP frequently justifies that its actions are in accordance to law while failing to mention that the CCP has the ability to set or change any law without any resistance. Many who got wealthy benefiting from the economic reforms would seek avenues to transfer out their wealth because protection of their property depends on where the authoritarian party wind blows.

The last few decades as outlined thus far in this chapter shown that there had been a constant flux in what is accepted ideology for China. After the civil war, the CCP has gone from communism central planning to socialism with Chinese characteristics to what is now functionally capitalistic, the CCP has had to constantly justify and convince the Chinese people of the changes. Deng Xiaoping, during his reforms, termed it as “feeling the stones as one crosses the river” as he explained the need to make unprecedented changes. The reforms however have a schizophrenic effect on the Chinese society as various aspects of economic reforms conflicted with the underlying ideology of the political party. The situation is exacerbated by the disruption of societal and cultural norms through Mao’s eradication of four olds (old customs, old culture, old habits, old ideas) during the “Cultural Revolution”. The CCP ripped the Chinese out of their cultural roots and as socialist ideology could barely legitimise the harshly enforced policies that affect many aspects of life, the CCP had to rely on doublethink and doublespeak to justify the constant changes. The conflict and irony could be perfectly illustrated by the clamped down of a student club, Marxist Society, in Peking University in 2018. The members of the student club were advocating for the labour rights of oppressed migrant workers and were organising unions in different regions. These actions stepped on the toes of the government and the student club was shut down and required to re-register, resulting in an overhaul of the student club having only members who would toe the line. So the CCP that was founded on communism ideology is now against collective actions through unionisation.

The shift in priorities from collective rights to economic growth at any costs resulted in perversions of ideology. From promising to be an egalitarian society to becoming one with a high level of income inequality, the CCP could no longer justify its legitimacy solely via the communist ideology. The persuasive power from communist ideology is especially low

when many party leaders are well off and even the top echelons have been exposed to be associated with obscene levels of wealth (The Economist, 2012), while heart-breaking poverty can still be seen in some rural regions and many migrant workers in the cities struggle to survive. While party messages might stress on achieving a “moderately prosperous society” (小康社会) for all by 2021, the reality is that many are merely living hand to mouth, struggling to keep up with the rising costs of living.

The party now has to depend heavily on nationalism ideology and conflating party with state so as to sustain its legitimacy. The importance of political history for Chinese society hence cannot be overstated as the CCP seek to sustain its longevity with a uniform knowledge and view of how China has arrived to its present. The next section will cover propaganda and socialisation of nationalism through its citizenship education.

### 3.2 Citizenship Education

Citizenship education is critical in the socialisation of a people and legitimisation of a government. The people have to have common values and expectations of their government in order to have a stable and legitimate government. Other than the media acting as a tool of socialisation, the other tool would be education, specifically citizenship education. In different parts of the world there would be different names for such education. Some call it national education, others call it civics education or society education. Whatever the name maybe, the general aims are usually to socialise students towards a common view of what a society's values should be, what roles the government play in the society and what are the duties of a citizen.

From Mao's destroying of the "four olds" "Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas" to Xi Jinping's thoughts proclaiming that "the CCP leads everything—the Party, the government, the military, society, education, east, west, north and south.", the CCP has always dictate how the Chinese society has to submit to the CCP.

From a young age, school-going children are socialised into wearing the red scarf that is both a symbol of the party and patriotism. The red scarf is bestowed on good students and held as exemplars together with heroic role models. Propaganda campaigns constantly utilises heroic role models such as self-sacrificing PLA soldier "comrade Lei Feng". When national heroes are always CCP members it is easy to conflate the nation with the party. In university, students have to study mandatory politics-related courses such as Maoism, Marxism and China Modern History. There is also "military education" at middle-school, high-school and university levels to cultivate collectivism and patriotism in students. These military education camps can vary from a week to a few weeks and would include basic drill formations, physical activities and theory classes. Trainees are also required to wear military uniforms and put through regimental daily activities. While these training camps are nothing like what proper military training entails, they do contribute towards fostering a common experience for Chinese students and reinforce the party messages (such as duty and obedience towards the party) that they are exposed to throughout their education.

A significant proportion of the citizenship education in China focuses on the "century of humiliation" for which ended when the CCP came into power. The main narrative for pre-CCP period is that China was weak and bullied by foreign forces (specifically Japan and Western powers). Disastrous CCP campaigns like the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution were casually mentioned, and their devastating effects were skipped over or



played down significantly (Buckley 2014). Rather, Mao's era is framed and taught as a period of unification and pioneering phase for which industrialisation set the stage for its economic marvel that China is enjoying today. Deng Xiaoping's era of opening up to the world is framed as learning from the West so as to strengthen China.

Since taking office in 2012, Xi Jinping had frequently utilised on the phrase "Chinese dream" in his speeches to rouse and rally the people in supporting the CCP. According to party journals, the Chinese dream is not just about personal prosperity but also include socialism, collective effort and national glory. While in recent years Xi may have utilised the abstract "Chinese dream" that the CCP can help China achieve, a large part of the CCP's narrative for staying in power still relies on the "struggles" in society and fights against external foes. Xi's message to senior party leaders in 2017 still echoed this strategy: "Our party was born under a sense of peril, grew up under a sense of peril and matured under a sense of peril".

Teachers in China have an unenviable task of re-conciliating the conflicting aims of the CCP. On one hand teachers have to teach and impart values of creativity and independent thinking to their students. On the other hand, they have to explain why then would there be such heavy-handed censorship by the government if people are expected to think for themselves and exercise critical thinking. The way out or frequently used excuse by many is to fall back on "othering". Censorship is not for the educated people. It is to protect the uneducated or lesser educated masses. Many simply fall back on the "China is not ready yet" excuse when they need to explain the lack of political freedoms and rights in China. Even universal suffrage is explained away in such a manner, arguing that the less cultured masses would likely elect an unworthy leader.

At every opportunity possible, foreign affairs issues are framed as other countries trying to trip China and prevent China from rising to its ordained position in the world as a major power. Few countries are framed as firm allies of China. Perhaps other than Pakistan as China needed Pakistan to counterbalance India. Other authoritarian countries like Russia and North Korea are merely convenient allies that China has mutual dependence for strategic purposes. Other countries are usually used as comparison for the superior system that the CCP has bestowed upon China. India would be held as an example when talking about development and progress whereby both countries have very large populations and used to be similarly poor but now China is several times the size of India in terms of GDP. North Korea would be the bogeyman when talking about the lack of freedoms since China has much more freedom as compared to North Korea. Western systems that focuses on individual liberties and social safety nets would be framed as weakening the countries. Generous labour policies make the people lazy while protests and strikes destabilizes the Western countries.

While China has typically frowned upon mass protests, it does not mean that there is a total ban on protests in China, nor does it mean that there are no unsanctioned social unrests. The CCP still uses mass protests to sway public opinion and galvanise support for issues that suit their causes. For example, there were organised protests that allowed the people to vent their anger at South Korea in 2017 because South Korea allowed the USA to install a missile defence in South Korea. Multiple protests against Japan had also happened whenever there were flashpoints regarding the Diaoyu Islands. These nationalistic protests have also provided inspiration for protests of other causes. Localised environmental and labour dispute protests have over time grown to be more tactical in framing their protests as being both showing and seeking support of the party, and law abiding (Gobel & Ong 2012). Afterall, it would be awkward to shut down a mass display support of the party.

Patriotism can be involuntary, coming from a primordial source inside citizens. Human beings are collective animals and essentially patriotism emanates from a sense of belonging, a sense of association on a very large scale. Each individual would have different levels of feelings and manifestation for patriotism, however as a nation there would be certain actions that are more commonly accepted. The CCP drums up feelings of patriotism and promotes actions that contribute to its longevity, utilising anything in the past, present and future that aids in their indispensability narrative. Most of the world have already put WWII behind as history while the CCP still relies on anti-Japanese and anti-foreigners to drum up domestic support.

The CCP came into power on the back of revolution and conflict. To declare the success of revolution means to lose the party's *raison d'être*. Hence, the longevity of CCP necessitates the existence of a threat. The easiest is to constantly repeat the narrative that the western world had exploited and bullied China in the past. The CCP had saved China from foreign oppressors but the western world is still out to oppress China, to keep China from progressing. Only the CCP can keep China unified and strong. Fear and victimhood narratives are powerful unifying tools for which the CCP would be harnessing for as long as possible.

For citizens living in a country that is founded by the ruling party and has never been governed by any other party, it is difficult for them to imagine a country with the CCP in power. There is also no incentive for the CCP to differentiate the party from the state from the country. Equating the party to the state confines the people from thinking the possibility of having any other political party. In fact, the current ranking system symbolically places the

state lower than the party. The State Council is the state government and it is headed by the premier who is ranked lower than the party secretary general in China's power hierarchy.

From insular communism to the eventual opening up to the world, the influence and control from Danwei's influence no longer as strong as more private enterprises and foreign companies were set up. China has become a (mostly) consumer capitalism society whereby many aspects of life are no longer strictly controlled by state. For many people, there is no more "danwei" that would control their lives. The Hukou system may still be in place but many Chinese people move around despite not having the proper paperwork. Being illegal domestic migrant is common and many still thrive without access to government services. The private sector offers employment, healthcare, education and other aspects of life that used to be the exclusive domain of the government. Local governments too do not enforce domestic migration laws strictly since they need migrant workers to drive the local economy. The power of education in binding the people together starts to dilute once people are out of school and as people are not rooted to their work organisation or location, the CCP has to depend on the media to sustain and propagate their messages.

### 3.3 Media

Control of communications allows the CCP to control the narrative. As mentioned earlier, the CCP depends on the classic external adversary narrative to build upon a sense of nationalism that supports the CCP. Drawing from recent history that had China ceding territory to various Western powers and Japan, the CCP reminds everyone that China need to be united to prevent other countries from taking any bit of China's land or bullying China on the international stage. And by equating the CCP as the representation of China, the Chinese

people thus need to stand behind the CCP. Contemporary news events such as the regular freedom of navigation exercises conducted by the US navy, territory disputes in the South China Sea and Indian borders, NATO bombing of Chinese embassy in Belgrade are all fodder for the CCP to stir up nationalism fervour.

Many people outside of China expected or hoped that as China gets richer, the people would bring about political change. A popular thinking follows the typical development theory that as the people grows richer and the middle class grows, the people would start to demand for more freedoms and political change. After all that is what happened with other East Asian societies including Taiwan and South Korea. China's joining of the WTO in 2001 was seen as a major milestone for political change brought about by economic change. The expected political change however did not come to pass. The political liberation could possibly have happened if the CCP did not crush the Tiananmen student movement with a heavy hand in 1989. But that glimmer of hope had long been extinguished.

Many were also hopeful that as increasingly large number of Chinese students begin to study overseas with the opening up of China. Optimists banked on the hope that overseas Chinese students being exposed to more liberal systems (both education and political), those students will bring those liberal ideas back home. That may be right initially. The initial wave of overseas Chinese students had to interact more with the local students as there were not that many Chinese students. They were exposed to local media as there were not much content created for overseas Chinese students. However, the later waves of students gradually became a lot more insular in their own cliques since there are a much larger number of Chinese students. For many universities in the US and UK, students from China contributed the most to the international student body. Many Chinese students could thus get by without

having to interact with the locals and the transfer of worldviews did not occur as well as anticipated. The advent of social media also meant that there are plenty of content created for and targeted at overseas Chinese students. These are typically disseminated through Wechat and Weibo and those content are not much different from what media in China are like. While those in China face barriers in consuming international content, overseas Chinese have no problem consuming content from China. Most overseas Chinese students are consuming content carried by Chinese internet companies that know that the CCP could punish them for dissenting content. Hence, there should not be too much expectation of ideas pollination and changes in attitudes.

With the “great firewall” of China constantly reported by various international news agencies about how numerous websites (ranging from social media sites such as Facebook to search engines such as Google to cloud services such as Dropbox) are banned in China and domestic search engines routinely block the results of sensitive search words, one would expect that the internet in China to be really dreary. Foreign journalists also constantly pointed out the taboo 3 T’s (Tiananmen, Tibet and Taiwan) that they are not to report should they want to stay in China (Rowlatt, 2012). However, it would not be accurate to describe the communication environment in China as Orwellian. Far from being the totalitarian system as portrayed in 1984 that can suppress everyone’s speech, the reality in China is a lot more faceted and nuanced than the simple images that many media reports portray. The media system in China is both state-dominated and market-dominated. While there is pressure of censorship from the government and self-censorship from media practitioners, various media outlets still need to function according to market forces (Shirk, 2010).

China started with commercialization of print media as early as 1979 when the CCP ceded total control over the print industry and allowed publications to support themselves through advertisements (Shirk, 2010). Following a brief retreat in policy in 1989 due to the Tiananmen student demonstrations, the commercialisation of the media industry resumed in the 1990's and further accelerated in 2000's as China sought to prepare its domestic media industry against foreign media companies with its entry into WTO. Today, various forms of media from newspapers, magazines, television stations, radio stations and websites compete aggressively for audiences and advertising income. Commercialized media products thus have a different look and style as compared to "official" products (such as People's Daily and CCTV) that are funded by the state. In contrast to the official sounding language and solemn content in official media; commercialized publications tend to focus on infotainment and would use lively and colloquial language.

The commercialization of the media was a source of "deep ambivalence" (Qian & Bandurski, 2010) within the party itself as while the CCP still want to retain control over the media, it also wanted the media companies to grow the media market and generate profits. China, after all, is determined to achieve economic growth at all costs. The solution was thus a half-hearted liberalization that allowed media companies to make most commercial decisions while the CCP dedicated much resource into making sure the content from these media outlets would not erode their authority and subvert their rule.

"Media commercialization" in the China's context is not the same as how most would understand the term. While most would equate commercialization with privatization, it is not the same with the media industry in China. The government still has stringent control over media outlets via a complex system of approvals, registrations and supervisions. What

“commercialization” meant is merely that the media outlets are expected to be market viable or self-sufficient through revenue streams such as subscription, publication sales and advertisements. All media outlets in China are required to have to a “managing institution” before they can register with the “General Administration of Press and Publications”. According to the regulations, organizations that can be a “managing institution” are all Party or government related organizations. The “managing institutions” of media outlets are thus usually the party committees of the local areas that the media outlets are based in. Hence, control of media outlets remains in the hands of the CCP.

While the control appears to be tight, it does not mean that media practitioners do not find ways to navigate around the obstacles. The system of “managing institution” meant that while responsibility lies with the local organizations serving as managing institutions, direct control is also divested to the local levels. Hence this led to a phenomenon known as “cross regional” or “cross level” reporting. To illustrate, a city level newspaper would not report on the corruption of government officials within its own city since it is directly controlled by the city Party committee. However, the provincial level newspaper or newspapers from another province might report on the matter since the provincial Party committee “outrank” the city and they do not report to the same “managing institution”. Driven either by commercial interests to increase readership or out of journalistic values, certain publications (such as Southern Weekend, Oriental Morning Post) are known to be publications that are more adventurous or liberal in reporting. These actions or attitudes are known in China as “playing edge ball” (Stern & Hassid, 2012), borrowing a term from table-tennis that means keeping to just barely within the rules of the game. That said, these actions are not without risks. Media outlets had been shut down and editorial teams have suffered repercussions for stepping on toes that have enough power. For example, Southern Weekend has had its editor replaced



regularly (Shirk, 2010) and Beijing Times had its “managing institute” changed from an organization directly connected to the Central Committee of the CCP to the Beijing city municipal committee just to cut down on its clout (Bandurski, 2011).

The localised control of media also meant that there are regional differences in restrictions depending on the tolerance of the Party committee leader in each area. For example, media in Shanghai is seen as being dull due to strict leaders, Guangdong publications are known to push boundaries and Hunan is known for their entertaining television stations that produce well-received shows that touch on societal issues. Control is also perceived to be tougher at the local or provincial level as compared to the national Publicity Department as some argue that the Party central sees the media as a control against widespread corruption. The inability of the government in Beijing to closely monitor local governments (the Chinese proverb “tian gao, huang di yuan”, translated as heaven is high and the emperor is far away, is frequently invoked to describe the situation) is a main reason why some argue that the central government allows the media more latitude since a less cautious media could allow for some contentious issues to surface before they get too serious.

It should be noted that not everything that was non-aligned with the establishment was filtered out by the CCP. The CCP do understand that there is merit in allowing some outlets for dissenting voices. The value of speaking truth to power is not unique to any society and there are many Chinese folklores that exalt such action. The key concerns are how widely these voices are heard and who gets to hear these dissenting voices. So long as the dissemination is limited and limited to those who are loyal to the party, these dissenting voices could be viewed as canaries in a mine. However, how much tolerance the CCP has for these dissenting voices ultimately depends on the paramount leader of the day. For example,

there were two Communist journals prior to 2001 that provided the platform for conservative CCP members to air their differing views on the “reforms and opening” carried out by the party. For years, these two journals published articles that criticised the economic reforms as the reforms went against communism ideals. These were tolerated as the readerships for both publications were small and mainly catered to academics and party officials. It also helped that they had the backing of former senior party officials. What ultimately led to the journals demise was that they got personal. Rather than critiquing emerging capitalist-friendly policies, they published an open letter signed by some former high-ranking party officials that accused Jiang Zemin of violating the basic statutes of the constitution and governed against the will of the people. Repercussions came swiftly as the CCP suspended the publications indefinitely.

Deng Xiaoping’s tour of southern China after his retirement was another example that demonstrated that there is some degree of tolerance for non-aligned content in the media. By 1992 when he embarked on his tour, Deng had already given up any official position in the CCP. However, in a bid to push on his economic reforms in the southern of part of China, Deng embarked on a month-long tour to reinforce his policies. Since Deng was no longer the paramount leader, the narrative was no longer centred around him. Only Shanghai’s Liberation Daily carried stories about the tour and Deng’s speeches as it happened. Months after however, the tour and the speeches were widely reported. This led to speculation that there was political infighting within the CCP and Jiang Zemin eventually had to side with Deng’s economic reformation to lean on Deng’s clout and solidify his rule (Zhao, 1993).

In view of all the restrictions, the CCP does show that it understands that political communication control has its limitations in this information age and demonstrates attempts

to justify its actions. In the period before China opened up its economy, the concept of media was simply that it is a function of the CCP to publicise its policies. Communication works one way, from top to bottom and hence it was acceptable to term the media as the “throat and tongue” of the party (Shirk, 2010). The media’s function in that period would not be unlike the newsletters of private organisations nowadays and media practitioners were simply government employees. Against this backdrop, many senior CCP leaders still frame the role of the media as being the “guidance of public opinion” for the CCP in recent years. However, with the economic reforms and commercialisation, information flows more easily into the country and the role of media began to evolve. Increasingly more media practitioners in commercialize media began to push boundaries and produce content that expose social issues, question policies and advocate for changes. Again, these pushing of boundaries ultimately depend on the tolerance of the paramount leader of the day.

As official Party funded publications lose majority of the audience to commercialized media, the CCP adapts to the evolving media ecology with a certain level of image management, tolerance and justification. Taking for example the “Publicity Department” of the CCP that manages the communication policies of China. Although many Western media and scholars still refer to it as the Propaganda Department, the organization has changed its English name from “Propaganda” to “Publicity” for more than a decade. (The Chinese name remains the same as the Chinese term “xuan chuan” has no negative connotation and can be translated as “publicity, “promotion” or “propaganda”) This naming practice may seem trivial but it reflects that Chinese leaders are aware that overt actions in public opinion shaping can be counterproductive. Certain issues, such as air pollution and food contamination, that although may reflect negatively on the government are tolerated since it would be impossible to cover up and exposing specific perpetrators for these issues allow these issues to be

addressed before further widespread of popular discontentment. Anger and discontent can then be directed at specific individuals while the CCP appears to be responsive. The severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic has also been highlighted by some to be a turning point for how the government has come to view the media. The playing down of the seriousness at the beginning of the epidemic made the official publications lose credibility and created a serious conundrum for the leaders when they needed the media to communicate important information to the people. At the same time, the SARS cover-up also taught the people to search for new and more sources of information beyond the mainstream media. Censorship actions are usually justified by the CCP as necessary for the preservation of social stability and harmony. However, if the use of communication control exacerbated a crisis, future use of controls would likely not be tolerated by the people. Hence, localised issues “mass incidents” (euphemism for mass protests) such as those involving labour or environment are given greater latitude in reporting than issues regarding civil rights or democracy.

The advent in internet brings about a whole new set of challenges for the Chinese government. China now has the largest number of internet users in world with 618 million internet users (CINIC, 2014). Putting this figure into context, China now has a population of about 1.35 billion people and thus the internet penetration rate at the national level is barely 50%. Given the global trend and China’s steady progression in literacy and economic performance, the number of users will definitely raise considerably more. Part of the internet's power comes from its decentralised structure and economic diversity. That is to say, no one part of the infrastructure or business could dominate and dictate how information could be disseminated or blocked. However, that is different for China. The CCP is determined that all forms of communication, including the internet, is under their control.

While the CCP could not dictate the terms on a world-wide basis, they have decided that access to the internet within China is part of China's "cyber sovereignty". Any company that wants to access China's more than a billion consumers have to abide by the CCP's rules or be denied access. Hence, the result is a form of internet that is insular, highly monitored and controlled. End to end communications, even private messages between individual users can be subjected censorship as telecommunications companies in China submit to CCP's demands.

As highlight by Shirk (2010), "censorship of newspapers, magazines, and television is largely invisible, but censorship over the Internet is obvious" (p.33). To be aware of the controls in the pre-internet era would require a high level of media literacy since the controls were exerted directly on media practitioners while the audience would merely be exposed to the end product. In the case of the internet, many internet users are content producers as well whose content could be censored. Moreover, mainstream media are mainly "push" media with consumers being served whatever is pushed out to the public while the internet is a "pull" media that consumers knowingly request for content. Hence knowing that something exists (such as Google and Facebook) but not being able to access it would heighten the awareness of censorship.

Awareness of censorship is not a concern for the CCP as the constant bombardment of rhetoric on stability management and ensuring that there are ample sources and supplies of entertainment online mitigate the impact of censorship. Many international sites that are banned in China have a corresponding China copy. The international community have FANG (Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google) while China's intranet has BAT (Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent). Tencent's Weixin (known as Wechat for the rest of the world) takes the place

of Facebook, Weibo stands in for Twitter, Alibaba's Taobao is bigger than Amazon while iQiyi is just one of many video streaming services that can rival Netflix. The Chinese government's ban on foreign internet companies have allowed domestic companies to thrive. Beyond thriving domestically, many of the Chinese internet companies are no longer just copying American products but are pushed by the intense competition in the Chinese market to innovate faster. Platforms like Wechat, Taobao and TikTok now serve a large number of international users and could rival against Silicon Valley technology companies.

In the situation of banned websites, some internet users in China have taken the route of circumvention. While Facebook may be banned in China, those who are determined can still "scale" over the firewall (through the use of VPN) and create accounts to network with other users. Ironically, there are even very official looking (but unverified) Facebook pages for the Chinese leaders Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang that regularly share photos of them in official settings. Being able to "scale the wall" does not mean that everyone in China is doing so. Robert et. al. (2011) from the Berkman Center of Internet and Society found that about merely 2 to 3% of internet users from heavily censored countries use circumvention tools. Based on the 3%, Mou et. al. (2016) optimistically estimated about 18 million users in China would use circumvention tools. It appears that the CCP's propaganda department may have taken Postman's (2006) "Amusing Ourselves to Death" as a how-to guide in controlling the people's use of online media. Provide enough amusement (in the form of sanitised China internet substitutes) and few would be perusing objectionable political content. Entertainment aside, a huge factor would also be that since most Chinese do not have that many foreign friends, there is insufficient motivation to go through all the trouble in using circumvention tools just to be able to access foreign content.

The affordances of the internet, allowing the Chinese people communicate in ways previously not possible, have also changed the attitudes towards communication. As pointed out by Qiang (2010):

*“The role of the Internet as a communications tool is especially meaningful in China where citizens previously had little to no opportunity for unconstrained public self-expression or access to free and uncensored information. Furthermore, these newfound freedoms have developed in spite of stringent government efforts to control the medium.”*  
(p.206)

A prevalence of “human flesh search engine” (online vigilantism that involved the participation of humans in the search for suspected “perpetrators”) incidents could also be a reflection of the lack of proper official justice mechanisms or a perception that the justice system is too weak. Many such episodes targeted corrupted government officials (or the offspring) while some targeted crimes that were seen to be ignored by the Ministry of Public Security. As highlighted by Yang (2009, p.104), “the absence of other avenues of public expression makes the internet especially amenable to contention”.

The addition of internet does not just mean an additional channel for communication in China. It also creates pressure for mainstream media since their credibility would suffer if they refrain from covering anything significant. Taking the example of a fire at CCTV’s building in 2009. The television station did not report on the fire that broke out in its building but reported on forest fires in Australia. Images of the CCTV fire however spread like wildfire on the internet, leading to people questioning the credibility of CCTV (Miao, 2009). “Human flesh search engine” episodes that started on the internet had also led to stories being covered by the mainstream media. The addition of internet to the environment has altered the

behaviour of other forms of media. Stories, information and communication are not confined to the silos of different media but are amalgamized within the Chinese society.

However, as the internet becomes entrenched in Chinese society, the CCP has also grown to become more sophisticated in controlling objectionable content. This led to a cat and mouse game between the users and censors. Chinese people would attempt to bypass censors by using homophones or convoluted phrases. For example, 64 (June 4th) is typically used to point to the Tiananmen incident, but as censors caught on, Chinese netizens began to use “7-1” “3+1” to refer to the incident. As technology progresses, censorship is no longer a tedious task involving humans to comb through content. Currently, in order to satisfy the demands of CCP, Chinese technology companies have invested heavily into machine-learning technology to allow automation of censorship. In WeChat, even private chats between peers will be monitored and garner suspension of account or ghosting of messages (you think you posted something, but in the end only you can see it) if sensitive content is involved. Now even more than ever, Chinese people do not want to mess with the possibility of account suspension as mobile apps are needed for everyday life. China has progressed to become a mostly cashless society that depends on apps to pay for everything. Even beggars on the street rely on mobile payment.

In sum, there are progressive changes in China’s communication environment over the last few decades. However, any change in attitude will likely be slow as top Chinese leaders still view the media as the Party’s device and are wary of pluralism in voices. In 2000, Jiang Zemin was hounded by some Hong Kong journalists at a media event about Tung Chee Hwa’s second term as Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Annoyed that the media were framing it as “appointment” rather than “support” and pushed hard to reveal his position, he lectured



the journalists for being naïve and gave them a cryptic answer “闷声发大财” (loosely translated as “be silent and get rich”).

Mikhail Gorbachev’s fate from his advocacy of glasnost also casted a long shadow for China’s leaders and as highlighted in Hu Jintao’s speech (cited in Zhao, 2012, p.152), “a very important reason from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Communist party there is Gorbachev’s advocacy of ‘ideological pluralism’ and the so-called ‘glasnost’”. This suggests strongly that liberalisation from within the party ranks would be highly unlikely in the near future. The fear of a Soviet Union-style collapse happening to the CCP always weigh against any political reform. Before Xi Jinping’s accession as CCP Chairman, some political watchers were still hopeful that Xi could be the progressive leader that they were waiting for. However, upon taking over from Hu Jintao, Xi proceeded to consolidate his power within the CCP and implemented more restrictive policies.

## Chapter 4

### Singapore

Singapore is an anomaly in media studies (George, 2012). As a developed and open economy with generally free access to the internet, the city state has frequently been rated poorly for civil liberties and press freedom by various NGOs. However, trust in media is still very high even though information of poor rankings in press freedom is widely known to the people in Singapore. It is even common for internet forum users in Singapore to refer to the national broadsheet as the “154<sup>th</sup>” (or whatever the rank was in the Reporters Without Borders index for the particular year) paper. The next section will elaborate on the socio-political situation in Singapore to provide a foundation for analysis.

#### 4.1 Political History Context

Formerly a British colony, Singapore’s short modern history dates back to just after the second world war. The British government reclaimed Singapore from Japanese rule after the second world war in 1945 and while the locals welcomed the return of British rule, they also kept in mind the level of commitment the British had towards protecting Singapore from foreign invaders. The British had surrendered Singapore to the Japanese as they deemed the war in Europe to be more important.

Following the return of British colonial rule, local leaders then petitioned for self-rule and independence from the British government. Self-government was granted in 1955 and eventually Singapore broke away from British rule and joined the Malaya Federation in 1963. The merging with other Malaysian states was not without hiccups. Singapore being the only ethnic Chinese majority state was led by People’s Action Party (PAP) leader, Lee Kuan Yew, who was agitating for a race-blind “Malaysian Malaysia” instead of a system favouring just

the Malay ethnic group. Racial clashes started happening in Singapore and the federation government was afraid that it would spread to the rest of Malaysia. Coupled with the fear that Singapore may increasingly be the power centre for Malaya Federation instead of Kuala Lumpur, Singapore was expelled from the federation in 1965. Hence, Singapore did not fight for its independence, but independence foisted upon it. How Singapore became independent then became a source of legitimacy for the PAP government. The PAP government would constantly highlight the vulnerabilities of Singapore but the PAP would work together with the people to ensure that Singapore survive. PAP essentially depended on a survivalism narrative for its legitimacy.

Since the first post-independence elections in 1968, the PAP has never had less than 90% of the seats in parliament, allowing the party to make any changes to legislation and even the constitution without any difficulty. Through legislation, the PAP was able to consolidate its influence on various groups typically seen as opinion leaders in society. In 1959, after riding into power on the back of labour activism, the PAP amended legislation allowing the government to refuse registration of new unions. The PAP then consolidated the unions under one umbrella through the formation of National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Since then, labour leaders are co-opted into PAP as members of parliament and the head of NTUC has always been a cabinet minister. Importantly, the government diminishes the influence of the unions by changing labour laws to allow unions to only deal with limited set of labour issues such as wages, benefits and certain work conditions. Other employment issues commonly seen as union related such as retrenchment, dismissals and promotions are deemed to be the right of employers.

In the 1970's, the universities were targeted. Student activism was high in the two universities. It was especially so in the Chinese medium university as the language policies of the government appeared to be putting those students at a disadvantage. In 1976, the PAP amended the legislation to limit the structure and funding of student clubs and allowed only one student body to engage in political activities. In 1980, the two universities were merged, ensuring that student activism could be managed from a single point and students no longer had a strong social identity in the form of common language or ethnicity to bind them together. The Chinese medium university that had leftist inclinations was thus closed down under the guise of a merger. Key social science research institutes were also co-opted into the system as former high-ranking civil servants were appointed as heads of these institutes. Vocal Singaporean academics were also managed out of Singapore as local institutions were unwilling to offer them tenure.

Next to be disciplined was the legal community. In the late 1980's, after a fiasco involving the president of the law society criticising government policies, the PAP legislated that the government has the authority to appoint members into the council of law society and the law society could only comment on legal matters that the government submitted to it. Thus, effectively shutting out any opinions that may run contrary to government position.

Religious groups were also seen to be potential sites for political dissent and were eventually fence-lined. Church workers were arrested along with 12 other individuals under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for their activism activities in the 1987. They were arrested for allegedly involvement in a "Marxist conspiracy to subvert the existing social and political system in Singapore". Following these arrests, the government enacted the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in 1990. The Act allows the government to place gag orders on

religious leaders deemed to be “carrying out activities to promote a political cause, or a cause of any political party while, or under the guise of, propagating or practising any religious belief” (Chapter 167 A subsection 8 (1)(b)). Since then, religious leaders and groups know better than to stray into matters that could be deemed political.

In the span of a few decades, labour, legal, religious, civil society and student communities were all politically neutered. Other than laws targeting specific groups, there are also legislations prohibiting organised political activities except by groups registered as political organisations. This effectively transforms political discourses into acts that are to be sanctioned by the state. Coupled with the less than clear definition of what constitutes a political activity, more people would stay away for fear of wandering into prohibited space unwittingly. Despite it all, Singaporeans still elected the PAP to power as the PAP government delivered on most basic needs such as housing, employment and education. Home ownership rate has grown from 60% in 1980 to above 80% in 1990 and has been hovering around 90% since. Unemployment rate hovers at around 2% unless there is a global economic downturn. The largely affordable education system has been rated as amongst the top countries in various metrics. The main issues debated and highlighted during elections season are usually about the economy and material needs of the people. Many would agree that the social compact in Singapore is that as long as the PAP delivers on material needs, the people would stay out of politics. More than just delivering on economic growth, the PAP builds an impeccable image of having an incorruptible and capable team in running the country. Most of the cabinet ministers graduate from Oxbridge or Ivy league varsities and served many years in various ministries or the military before being elected into political office. The PAP wants to portray a leadership made up of capable technocrats and not self-serving politicians. Corruption at any level in the civil service are swiftly and publicly dealt

with. Singaporeans rarely come across situations that require greasing of palms. Singapore always ranked amongst the top few countries in the “Corruption Perceptions Index”. The PAP’s performance legitimacy has thus led to a very muted political environment in Singapore. The PAP always winning a super majority of parliament seats indicate that the masses have accepted the framework as built by the PAP.

However, from time to time, there would be episodes signalling the PAP’s lost of touch in public sentiments. The saga involving a prominent Singaporean novelist, Catherine Lim, does offer an example of the occasional deviation in narrative within a limited public sphere. In 1994, Singapore’s only broadsheet *The Straits Times* published a political commentary by Lim, “The PAP and the people—A Great Affective Divide”, arguing how the PAP had lost touch with the people. Following a subsequent commentary by Lim on how Goh Chok Tong, Singapore’s second PM after Lee Kuan Yew, was governing in the shadow of Lee, Goh’s press secretary replied sharply in the papers (Chan, 1994), challenging Lim to follow the footsteps of Jeffery Archer and join politics if she wanted to espouse her political views. Goh subsequently sent Lim a letter stating why he replied publicly as he had to “set out the out-of-bounds markers clearly, so that everyone knows the limits of openness and consultation” and it does not include “demolishing the respect for and standing of the Prime Minister and his government by systematic contempt and denigration in the media” (*The Straits Times*, 1994). The irony of the state attempting to silence critics playing out on the country’s only English broadsheet was not lost on *Straits Times*, prompting an editor to write a follow-up article questioning “what constituted political comment and who should be allowed to give it” (Fernandez, 1994), albeit in a very docile manner that gave the government more room to defend itself.

The Catherine Lim incident may have been very much talked about, but it is not the only case of public dissent/criticism. Most people take a conservative approach for fear of being seen as anti-establishment and might be blacklisted in their career. A vocal academic, Cherian George, had to leave Singapore to pursue his academic career elsewhere as no university in Singapore was willing to offer him tenure despite being well regarded by peers in his field. There were instances whereby senior career civil servants waited till they are almost retired or already retired before dishing out their critiques of government policies. After all, not much damage can be done to them since they are already at the end of their career.

Finally, there is the use of libel lawsuits as a means to regulate participation in the public sphere. Since 1987, multiple lawsuits had been initiated by the PAP leaders against media organisations, politicians and political activists. Given that the quantum of damages awarded could go upwards of hundreds of thousand dollars, politicians had been bankrupted because of these lawsuits. These lawsuits, even if only brought upon a few people, were enough to send a warning to the rest of the population that freedom of speech can be very expensive, potentially leading to self-censorship when it is not clear what sort of criticism could lead to lawsuits. Aside from civil libel suits, the state has also dished out punishments for errant speech through criminal defamation, contempt of court and “wounding of religious or racial feelings”. As these cases typically involved some form of criticisms of the government and most people are not cognizant of the details of each case and the accompanying laws transgressed, collectively these factors contributed to a sense of fear that brought about self-censorship.

It should be noted that in the cases of “wounding of religious and racial feelings”, many a times it involves insensitive speech rather than hate speech. The most recent case involving Amos Yee in 2015 was due to Yee criticising Christians of being delusional, having no logic or being grounded in reality. In the Yee episode, Yee made numerous verbiage diarrhoea, but many simply thought that he got into trouble because he criticised Lee Kwan Yew. In any other democratic country, speech of similar content probably would be dismissed as a teenage rant but Yee was punished with a jail sentence. Religion and race are two issues that the PAP government constantly highlight as being sensitive and quite a number of policies are crafted with these issues in mind. Public housing policies ensure that each block of residential flat has the same proportion of each race according to the national proportion. Compulsory military duty tacitly blocks out Malays from serving in sensitive units as the rationale is that they could have family in neighbouring countries, and thus are a security risk. Every ethnic group have their own government sanctioned “self-help” group to help their under-privileged. Some have voiced that the emphasis of race and religion entrenches the differences while the PAP defend it as being pragmatic.

Over the years, there are increasingly more people voicing that there should be more space and opportunities for different voices to be heard. The 1980’s global economic downturn prompted many authoritarian regimes to democratize and Singapore had a minor effect from the global push. Singapore elected its first opposition MP to parliament in 1981 and more people were pushing for an alternative voice in parliament. The PAP does heed those calls and implemented some token measures that allow for alternative voices to be aired. After years of not having any opposition MPs in parliament, the PAP implemented the non-constituency MP (NCMP) scheme in 1984 that allowed the best performing loser(s) from the opposition to take up a NCMP seat in parliament. These positions initially had some



restrictions on voting rights in parliament but were later removed. The number of seats for NCMP was also gradually increased to ensure that there are at least 12 oppositions in parliament (either by winning or by being the best performing losers). In 1990, the PAP also implemented the nominated member of parliament (NMP) scheme that allows a committee to appoint up to 9 individuals who are independent and non-partisan to the parliament. These NMP are not allowed to vote on certain bills but are allowed to participate in all parliamentary debates. Beside parliamentary changes, the PAP also designated a small park as “Speakers’ Corner” that allows for protests, speeches and performances with minimal restrictions (McIlvenny, 1996). Speakers and organisers would still have to register their events and foreigners are restricted from active participation.

#### 4.2 Citizenship Education

The PAP government has always framed politics as being antagonistic and a hindrance to governance. Hence, citizenship education has no place for political awareness. Political debates and processes are to be left to the politicians. Singapore’s education system has been under the PAP’s influence since independence and the PAP has kept political education out of the picture. Alviar-Martin and Baildon (2016) in comparison of Hong Kong and Singapore’s citizenship education commented that Singapore’s form of citizenship education is depoliticised, emphasizing on moral and utilitarian goals.

While education curriculum might be depoliticised, it does not mean that there is no political influence. Many Singaporeans go through kindergartens run by the PAP. These kindergartens were first set up in the 1960’s to provide low cost kindergarten education and now have expanded to include all preschool levels from 6-month-old infant care to 6-year-old kindergarten. While these PAP-run preschools do not have any political content in the

curriculum, children attending these kindergartens are exposed to party logos that adorned these kindergartens. The effect is especially pronounced during election season as party flags would be lining up whatever available space around these preschools. Some of these kindergartens also served as sites for which PAP MPs conduct their “meet the people” sessions. Thus, there is an association of childhood with the PAP for many who had attended the PAP kindergartens.

For primary and secondary school education, citizenship education is packaged under character and citizenship education (previously known as civics and moral education) that stresses on being a concerned citizen and contributing member in a civic society. As mentioned by Tan (2009), civic society is the term used the state and “conceived as a depoliticised civil society”. The idea of a civil society is not adopted and taught in Singapore as there are connotations of antagonism and challenges the dominance of the state as the concept is understood in liberal democratic societies. In Singapore, in a civic society devoid of politics, students are encouraged to be engaged in the community and volunteer their time for the lesser privileged. Every student has to chalk up a certain number of hours under the “community involvement programme”. The citizenship curriculum thus is packed with content that encourage values such as harmony, responsibility and respect.

Other components are the development of a national identity and a sense patriotism within the students. There are two narratives for which the PAP government constantly utilises. One is the sense of vulnerability. It is constantly stressed that Singapore is a non-Muslim country situated in a Muslim dominated region and thus, without sufficient defence, could be easily subjugated by neighbouring countries. Singapore does not have natural resources so Singapore could be starved to collapse if supplies to water, energy, food and

necessities were to be cut. Internally, Singapore has natural fracture lines due to the population's multi-racial and multi-religious composition. All these challenges then feed into the other narrative of excelling despite the challenges that the country faces. Every award, accolade, world beating metric would be trumpeted and attributed to the efficient and pragmatic PAP government who could rally unified Singaporeans to achieve such results.

Racial and religious differences are frequently brought up to stress on the vulnerability of Singapore. Some argue that harping on the differences is a divisive political tactic leveraging on identity politics. While others argue that being race-blind is naïve and it would be better to acknowledge the differences and then foster tolerance between groups rather than hope for integration. "Racial harmony days" thus are a mainstay for Singapore education and schools would have activities for different racial/religious groups share about their culture. Major public events would also have leaders from various religious groups attending to bless and pray for good weather and smooth developments.

To foster a common experience, every primary school student would have to attend and watch the National Day parade once during their primary school education. The parade is the annual large-scale performance that the government organises to foster a sense of national pride and identity. Typically, the parade would feature contingent marches and mass performances not unlike how the opening ceremony of international sports events are like, except with a stronger nationalism theme.

Civic engagement and participation in the political process are not part of the curriculum since the curriculum is "depoliticised". Political protests in Singapore were framed as "riots" in the history books rather than protests that escalated into violence. Other

than the racial clashes in the 1960's between the Chinese and the Malays, the last large-scale demonstration of note was the 1956 Chinese middle school demonstrations. Since then only some very small scale protests were held by activists who are concerned with democratic issues.

Even for university education, what constitutes as citizenship education typically consists of doing community work with the underprivileged or going overseas to build schools for the poor. Other than political science students, few other students are exposed to concepts about different forms of government, political participation, political processes and institutions etc. It is not uncommon to find Singaporeans who have gone through the entire education system and not be aware of how the parliamentary system works in Singapore. In sum, the idea of citizenship as taught in Singapore does not call political awareness and participation. Rather citizenship as fostered by the system focuses on service to society and country.

#### 4.3 Media

From the above description thus far, we can see the shrinking of the public sphere due to the dwindling of spaces for discourse and the withdrawal of opinion leaders. These factors potentially reinforce the effects of one another, likely to lead to a “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) in Singapore as people find it harder to know what others are thinking and are reluctant to voice out opinions that are not widely reported by the mainstream media. The current state of Singapore's public sphere is predominantly shaped by the actions and policies of the ruling party, People's Action Party (PAP), and thus this section on the media landscape will focus on the transformations from just before PAP came into power to the current period.

In the 1950's, when the PAP was still an opposition party in parliament, the leader of the party, Lee Kuan Yew, knew first hand that a restricted public sphere would pose difficulties for those challenging the incumbents and how it could be detrimental to the public. Displeased with the colonial laws that restricted the press, Lee argued in parliament:

*“Then an intimidated Press - and some sections of the Press here do not need intimidation because they have very friendly owners - the Press and the Government-controlled radio together can regularly sing your praises and slowly and steadily the people are made to forget the evil things that have already been done. Or if these things are referred to again, they are conveniently distorted, and distorted with impunity, because there will be no opposition to contradict it. [...] When everything becomes peaceful and tranquil, complacency sets in, and degeneration begins.”* (Singapore Parliament Report 4 October 1956 Vol. 2 Col. 323)

After coming into power, the PAP kept the colonial legacy press laws, ensuring that it was able to keep the press in check. Newspapers deemed to be influenced by communists were shut down and those with overseas financial backing had their licenses revoked. The PAP also utilised another colonial legacy, the ISA, to arrest senior journalists in 1971. 15 years after championing for the cause of press freedom in parliament, Lee Kuan Yew changed his stance once he was the one in control and enjoying the benefits of being able to control the press, declaring that “Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government.” (Lee, 1971) Lee was not coy about his stance as he made the speech to an international audience at the International Press Institute. The PAP

government did not think that the lack of press freedom would damage the country's standing on the international stage.

In 1974, the PAP expanded upon colonial licensing laws and enacted the Newspaper and Printing Press Act (NPPA), setting the stage for what George (2012) terms as “calibrated coercion” of the media. The NPPA dictates that only public companies are allowed to print newspapers, effectively tying newspaper printing to market pressures. Share owners would likely apply pressure on the publisher to place commercial interests above journalistic idealism and also that ensuring stability of the country would be paramount. Coupled with another important change, which is that newspaper companies are required to have management shares that the government can decide who can own, the NPPA ensures that the management of the company would always be under the government's influence even if not control. Between 1970 to the early 1980's, newspapers were either closed down or eventually merged with the main broadsheet to form the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). In the 1980's, the government started appointing former senior government officials into the board of SPH and following that, former senior civil servants were also parachuted into senior management of SPH. While the various changes had led to some protests within the newsroom, the resistance was futile and since then SPH's senior management have all been former civil servants.

The only other local media company in Singapore is Mediacorp, which is predominately a broadcaster that operates most of the local radio stations and is the sole provider of free to air television. Mediacorp is owned by Temasek Holdings, a government investment arm, and so the government has control over leadership positions within the company. Like SPH, former senior civil servants are parachuted into leadership positions in

Mediacorp. Foreign media companies are allowed to operate in Singapore but owing to the local market size, many simply have a presence to distribute overseas content rather than produce locally sourced materials. For the few that do produce local content, they are generally focused on trade and business-related topics, hence generally do not ruffle any feathers. The PAP government demands the right of reply and publications have to published unedited replies from the government to set the story straight when it deems to have been unfairly portrayed. The PAP had in the past restricted circulation or allowed circulation without the ability to carry advertisements for those media deemed to have reported the Singapore government unfairly.

Aside from restrictions in circulation and advertising, the most prominent and fear-inducing measure would be through the use of defamation law. Over the years, defamation suits had been brought against foreign media (such as Bloomberg and International Herald Tribune) due to insinuations that the Lee Hsien Loong had risen to become the third PM of Singapore due to Lee Kuan Yew. There were also cases whereby the media (Far Eastern Economic Review and Star) was sued for making unsubstantiated claims of corruption. In recent years, the ante has been upped whereby criminal defamation law has been used. Criminal defamation is a more serious charge since it carries the possibility of a jail sentence if convicted. The editor and an author for The Online Citizen were charged with criminal defamation in 2018 and the outcome is still pending (as of late 2018). All these cases were all widely reported in the media and court proceedings were open to public. The publicness of these cases both contribute to the PAP's assertion of being above board as well as striking a fear in media practitioners in how they report or comment on the Singapore government.

Singapore's mainstream media space, as it is now, still have the reputation of being able to report and transmit factual information. According to Edelman Trust Barometer 2013, 70% of the respondents in Singapore indicated that they trust the media. However, according to Freedom House (2012) and Reporters with Borders (2012), Singapore is ranked 150th and 135th respectively for media freedom. How then does one make sense of the contradiction in the assessment of media in Singapore? Some may explain that the lack of dissenting information creates a more compliant and trusting populace (Norris and Inglehart, 2010). However, Singapore is not a hermit country like North Korea. There are no restrictions on the movement of people and information can be accessed readily on the internet. Any blatant reporting of inaccurate information would be exposed online easily. It is not the issue with accuracy that is the crux but the presentation and representation in information that requires inspection. It is the emotions, reactions and differing opinions of the people that may be missing in the mainstream media. Most Singaporeans trust that the mainstream media will present facts competently. But whether they think their interests and positions will be represented in the media is another question. The low rankings in media freedom reflects the reservations that media practitioners face when conducting their work but ultimately, the pressure exerted influences the framing of news rather than veracity of news.

The PAP takes the view that the media is a conduit for information rather than a space for representation and mutual justification of beliefs between the government and the governed. According to the PAP leadership, "the mass media can help to present Singapore's problems simply and clearly and then explain how if they support certain programmes and policies these problems can be solved" (Lee, 1971). More recently, Singapore's law minister, Shanmugam (2010), reiterated that the press "should not join the political fray and become a political actor. It should not campaign for or against a policy position." Hence, for the PAP



the role of the gatekeeper or agenda setter lies not in the media but the state. As pointed out by George (2012), the “state routinely forecloses debate on a wide range of issues, claiming the unilateral right to declare when the time for decision has arrived and when further contention is not in the national interest”(p.71). Simply put, facts and information are presented but differences in opinions may not see the light of day.

Rather than relying on a free press to perform the function for the collation of information on political support, the PAP has relied on direct interpersonal interactions. The PAP requires its elected members to conduct regular “Meet the People” sessions whereby the constituents could meet with their member of parliament for assistance in solving various problems that can be alleviated via government departments (for example application of welfare grants, appeals towards minor offences etc.). In addition, the government set up a “People’s Association” (See Kimball, 1993 for details) that organises grassroots committees and activities, of which the PAP MPs are usually the advisors for each district. Thus giving them regular contact opportunities with the people on the ground. This is especially beneficial for the PAP as organised outdoor events are strictly regulated, requiring permits and are restrictive on political agendas. Events organised through the People’s Association can thus be framed as community events rather than political events even when the guests of honour typically are PAP MPs. The fear that the less politically engaged would be less likely to voice out and in turn not have their concerns addressed are thus mitigated by these touchpoints and feedback systems.

The 1990’s opened up new space for public sphere with the advent of the internet. Since the introduction of the internet in Singapore, the government has always taken a “light touch” (Hachigian, 2002) approach in managing the new medium. Recognising that the

internet as key to the knowledge-based economy that the world is moving towards, the government has been mindful not to hamper the flow of information that the economy needs. The structure of the internet also does not allow the PAP to regulate easily what information flows into the country as that of mainstream media. Hence, only a hundred websites are blocked “symbolically” to reflect the accepted moral values of Singapore’s society (the list of banned sites has never been made public, but banned sites are in general known to include pornography sites and racial hate sites). In recent years, in addition to the symbolic list, gambling and piracy sites have also been blocked. Hence, practically speaking, there are minimal restrictions for the public sphere afforded by the internet. While anybody could produce content on the internet, certain websites with content that is related to politics may be gazetted and made to register with the regulatory agency. There is no direct control over the content produced, content producers of sensitive issues are expected to be responsible for the content instead of being able to hide behind anonymity.

In the first decade of the internet, while there was potential for anyone to be content producers, there was still the need to establish platforms of distribution. One still needed a personal website, a blog or email lists. Then an audience needed to be cultivated so that sufficient people would visit these sites or stay subscribed to the emails. However, with the rise of social media, people’s immediate friends in social media sites have become their distribution network. These online networks are interconnected and one no longer needs to specially create any site to spread ideas and messages. A posting on Facebook or a tweet on twitter could possibly be disseminated widely without needing to build up a loyal readership.

The internet has thus allowed some to better navigate the restrictive communication space in Singapore. Without editorial gatekeeping or commercial concerns, some bloggers

could push the boundaries and post dissenting opinions easily. If and when served any legal warning, they would simply retract and remove these posts immediately. Similar to “playing edge ball” in China, Singapore has its own “OB marker”, a term adopted from golf to indicate the area where play is not allowed and in the usage for communications, denotes issues or topics which are not permissible for discussion. Issues pertaining to race and religion are typically steered clear by most people unless they are in agreement with the government’s stance. Other than issues on race and religion, similar to China, boundaries for what should not be discussed publicly in Singapore are deliberately kept ambiguous to rein in the majority. For the few who are pushing the boundaries, the rationale is it is easier to seek forgiveness than permission. However the apprehension of straying outside the limits still persists for the majority as many would still warn others about “lim kopi” (literally meaning “drink coffee” as according to the urban legend of the state interrogating suspects in a cold room and serving bad coffee to keep them awake) (Cowan, 2010), alluding to the possibility of being arrested and questioned by the state.

However, while the space has been expanded with the advent of internet, the availability of wider space without opinion leaders would still result in a sterile public sphere where debates and exchange of opinions regarding politics are limited. As reported by George (2006), Malaysia which shares many similar socio-politico constraints faced by Singaporeans, has a much more active political discourse in cyberspace than that of Singapore despite Singapore having a higher level of internet penetration. George attributed it to the more active civil society that existed in Malaysia before the advent of the internet. Hence, changes or enhancement to communicative space is insufficient in encouraging political talk and engagement if there is a lack of opinion leaders. Technological advancements cannot replace the importance of social norms.

As the internet evolves over the years, information distribution and consumption also change. More people are moving away from mainstream media as they seek alternative voices and compare the news that are available to them. As it becomes much easier to be a news provider in the internet-age, the PAP adapted their control to the media environment. In 2013 then Media Development Authority (renamed and restructured as Info-Communications and Media Development Authority in 2016) imposed a new licensing scheme requiring local news websites (that have a significant number of readers) to obtain individual licences in order to carry on operating in Singapore. Ten websites were identified and of the 10, only Yahoo News was not operated by either SPH or Mediacorp. Critically, this licence required the operator to put up a performance bond of \$50000 that may be forfeited if they run afoul of the rules. Key among which is the rule that the website operator would be required to remove content that is in breach of MDA standards within 24 hours. The “standards” cover the usual ambiguous parameters of public interest, public security, or national harmony that would be determined by the authority. Hence, any news website targeting Singaporeans that reach a critical mass of readers would be placed under scrutiny and have to consider the possibility of losing the performance bond if they are not careful in monitoring their content.

Then with the rise in prominence of “fake news”, the PAP government deem it necessary to legislate a new law to mitigate against the problem. In 2019, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) was enacted. The main thrust of the law is that it allows the government to direct social media platforms to put up correction notice or remove any content that it deems to be false and against public interest. One of the definitions of public interest within the law is the diminishing of public confidence in the government. Social media platforms can also be ordered to suspend accounts deemed to be spreading

untruths and disclose information on political content. Websites that repeatedly carry falsehoods can also be blocked under this law. All actions within the law can be directed by the government media development authority without any independent or judicial oversight. Although actions can be challenged in court, it would be onerous and should such actions be carried out during time sensitive periods such as elections, judicial reversals of government actions could be too late. This marks a departure from the “light touch” policy of the past and entrusts the government with immense power in interpreting what is “falsehood” and thus subject to blocking by the government.

The influence and meddling by the PAP government in the media used to be a hush hush matter that journalists traded war stories only within their circle. However, in recent years, retired veteran journalists are more becoming open about such meddling as they either blogged or published memoirs about their years in the newsroom (See Cheong 2013 and Balji 2019). It should be noted that Singaporeans are not ignorant about the influence that the PAP government has over the mainstream media. Most Singaporeans would acknowledge that the government has influence over the mainstream media even if many cannot articulate how or in what form the influence could be. What is happening is not direct censorship. As mentioned by George (2012), “overt censorship has been largely replaced by self-censorship, achieved through economic disincentives against non-cooperation with the state.”

## Chapter 5

### Hong Kong

A former colony of the United Kingdom for more than 150 years, Hong Kong has now reverted to China's control for more than two decades. Now officially known as Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government had promised to leave much of Hong Kong's domestic administration and politics intact for at least 50 years under the "one country, two systems" principle. The image of Hong Kong's free media system hence offers a stark contrast to the Chinese restrictive media system and is a source of political tension both in Hong Kong as well as within the Mainland.

#### 5.1 Political History Context

Hong Kong island and Kowloon were ceded to the British after the two opium wars in 1841 and 1860. Subsequently, a larger swath of land known as "New Territories" was leased for 99 years from 1898. Other than a break during the Second World War, Hong Kong was governed by the British. These hundred odd years of colonial history thus set up the mixed identity of Hong Kong people. More than 90% of Hong Kong people are ethnic Chinese and trace their roots to China, and many still have family in the mainland. Sharing a land border with Mainland China, Hong Kong has always attracted migrants from Mainland China. Mainlanders either migrate to Hong Kong to seek a better future or to flee from trouble in the mainland. The Second World War, Chinese civil war, famines and cultural revolution had all driven Chinese people to flee to Hong Kong. Hong Kong's population trebled in the post war period due to the arrival of refugees. Hence, while many people in Hong Kong do not identify with the political system of the mainland, they are still linked closely with the mainland in terms of cultural and familial ties.

The development and progress of Hong Kong in the colonial era was very much dependent on the governor and many simply maintained status quo in the political domain since political reforms would likely result in complications in administration for a colonial government. Hence, most governors of Hong Kong focus on ensuring that the laissez faire economy remains functional and the people were generally satisfied to being left alone to etch out a living. Even Governor Murray MacLehose, who left the most impact in social welfare reforms and was still fondly remembered by the people of Hong Kong after many years, chose not to pursue any democratic or political reforms for Hong Kong as he believed Hong Kong would eventually be under China's rule (The Telegraph, 2000).

The decolonization trend in many parts of the world after the Second World War initially had some influence in the democratization process in Hong Kong. However, any talks regarding self-governance was swiftly shut down when the CCP threatened to send troops into Hong Kong should it happen. The CCP preferred Hong Kong to remain as a colony. For the CCP, negotiating for the return of Hong Kong between two governments was more desirable than having to deal with a population wanting to be independent from China.

As the end of the 99-year lease of New Territories neared, Margaret Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping negotiated and eventually came to the outcome of "one country two systems" deal for the return of Hong Kong in its entirety. Hong Kong would however be allowed to maintain its existing system for 50 years after 1997. The relatively more hands-off approach of the colonial government in the final decade before the handover in 1997 allowed civil society in Hong Kong to flourish and along with it, an active press media. While this led to some segments of the society to be openly vocal about social issues, democratic culture was not entrenched in the society yet. Many simply expected a hands-off government that do not

hinder their ability to make a living. The high level of emigration in the decade before the handover suggest that many did not believe in the impending system. People of means chose to leave rather than campaign to make changes. Most believe that they were powerless to make any significant change to Hong Kong's political system, existing or future. In addition, a significant proportion of the population were first generation migrants from China with mixed feelings over the return of Hong Kong.

The final governor, Chris Patten, had introduced political reforms to allow more people to vote but the short period was not sufficient to change attitudes. As shown by the low voter turnout in the 1995 Legco elections of only 35%, many Hong Kong people did not think it was important to vote. Some argued that the lack of democratic desires stemmed from the colonial government's lack of interests in building a democratic culture or institutions and the lack of universal suffrage. Nevertheless, the lack of participation did not mean that the people were not paying attention. Lau and Kuan (1995) labelled Hong Kong people "attentive spectators" as the vibrant media environment had kept the population aware of political developments. The press was given ample freedom during the colonial years because much of the content were focused on China issues given the close ties many Hong Kong people still maintain with the mainland. Hong Kong's culture of protest grew in the aftermath of 1989 Tiananmen incident. The colonial government did not shut down the protests as the annual protests were not directed towards their rule. There was no reason to shut them but allowing the protests help in directing attention and any dissatisfaction away from the colonial government.

The heads of government in Hong Kong were never directly elected and popular election of legislators was only implemented a decade before the handover. Hence, political



interests and participation amongst a large segment of the people were not high prior to 1997. After 1997, the head of Hong Kong (Chief Executive) continued to be a position that is not decided by the general public but is elected by a select group of 1200 people (chosen by 6% of eligible Hong Kong voters) and then approved by the Chinese government. Lacking the mandate of a popular election, many people in Hong Kong thus saw the Hong Kong government as a proxy of the Chinese government rather than their own representative government. Hong Kong's legislature has a hybrid regime with half functional constituencies and half geographical constituencies. Functional constituencies refer to seats held by members representing various industries and special interest groups. These seats are voted by members or organisations within that community. Typically, functional constituency seats are held by pro-Beijing representatives as these business interest groups stand to gain with friendlier Beijing relationship while geographical constituency seats are held by pro-democracy candidates. Therein lies the problem of lower perception of legitimacy of the government. The people cannot elect the Chief Executive while the CCP has undue influence over half the seats in Legco. Fundamentally, the Chief Executive serves two political masters, the CCP and the people of Hong Kong, of which the CCP has a greater say on whether the Chief Executive can stay on the job and what forms of economic support the mainland could offer. While the interests of these two sides may not always be in opposition, frequently their interests do not align as the two sides have different perspectives of what is important.

The negative association of the Hong Kong government and Chinese government was exacerbated by the unfortunate coincidence of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. After taking over the rein from the last Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten; the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee Hwa, had to steer Hong Kong out of the financial crisis. Hong Kong's economy did not recover fast enough while under Tung's watch and his first term

was also plagued by a series of hastily implemented policies that lacked proper consultation with the people. Hence while many were cautious about politics during the transitional period, the negative perceptions of an incapable and unresponsive government that was hamstrung by the CCP had already started to set in.

A key event that shaped Hong Kong's current political landscape was the proposed "Hong Kong Basic Law Article 23" which sought to prohibit activities pertaining to subversion, sedition and secession. It also proposed prohibiting involvement of foreign organisations in Hong Kong politics. Introduced in 2002 just after Tung Chee Hwa's "re-election", it generated a wide and intensive response from the Hong Kong people as it was seen as giving the government too much power and the concepts of government and state were used interchangeably in the proposal, hence perceived to prohibit opposition towards the government too. Together with other issues (bungling the containment of the SARS epidemic, faltering economy and general disapproval of Tung Chee Hwa), an estimated half a million people took to the streets to protest against the government on the anniversary of Hong Kong's handover in 2003. This was seen as the event that triggered more people in Hong Kong to be "repoliticized" and become politically aware (Lee, 2005).

In 2012, the Hong Kong government tried to push through a patriotic national education programme but was met with strong opposition. Many thought that it was a propaganda programme pushed by the Beijing government. The opposition of the programme then led to youth activism and was also what led to the prominence of Joshua Wong as a youth activist. The plan to introduce the programme was eventually suspended. Then in 2014, youths again led in political activism in Hong Kong as they staged a protest that occupied parts of Hong Kong for 79 days. The protest later became known as the Umbrella Movement

for the frequent use of umbrella as they fought for true universal suffrage in Hong Kong. The crux of the protest was that Beijing had veto power over who could be on the ballot in the election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. The protests in 2012 and 2014 were generally seen as events that awakened the political consciousness of Hong Kong people as the large scale and sustained protests made political news and discourse unavoidable. People had to express their position on support or disapproval. People had to find out more so as to be able to come to a position on the protests.

Some had drawn links to Hong Kong's status as a former British colony as a source of discontent towards the current SAR government. The Union Jack was also carried by some protestors at times. But it should be noted that the political awakening cannot be attributed to the colonial history. Hong Kong people never had the ability to choose their governor in the colonial days and many of these student protestors were either not born or too young to remember how Hong Kong was like during the colonial government. Others point to economic pains as the source for low support of the government. Wages in Hong Kong are depressed due to influx of mainlanders while cost of living is high.

Another socio-economic problem is the inability or difficulty in getting on the property ladder for many ordinary Hong Kong people. Hong Kong has the world's priciest home market and the average home costs 18 times the gross annual median income in 2016. This meant that an average person in Hong Kong has to work 18 years and not spend a single cent of that income to afford an average home. For comparison, Singapore's average home price is about 5 times gross annual median income. Hong Kong faces a property crunch not because a lack of land but because of land use laws and land developer interests. Hong Kong has a land area of 1106 square Km as compared with Singapore's 716 square Km. Hong

Kong has about a million more residents but does not have to allocate land for military uses that Singapore need to. With a smaller land mass, property is still much cheaper in Singapore and Singaporeans in general have larger homes than Hong Kong people. The problem for Hong Kong is that much of the land is being hoarded by developers, zoned for non-residential use or reserved for nature. The Hong Kong government depends significantly on land sale for revenue and thus has no motivation to change policies that would drive down land price. Any significant fall in land price would disrupt the Hong Kong government's budget. Hong Kong may have a lower income tax regime but the premium paid towards property would be heftier for Hong Kong's middle class aspiring to own a home.

Years of stagnant salary growth coupled with soaring property prices has led to youths losing hope for the future. When there is nothing or little to lose, more of them would join in the protests seeking changes to the government. Hence, resulting in mass protests such as the 2014 Umbrella movement. Many youths turned to protests in 2014 demanding more transparent elections and a direct election of the Chief Executive rather than having one pre-selected by the CCP.

While Hong Kong is known for being a system with strong rule of law, the CCP still has influence over its legal system and is increasingly exerting that influence. Key amongst which is that China's National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) holds the final "power interpretation" of the law. While this power has been used sparingly (five times) since the handover till 2017, it gives the CCP sway over political issues. For example, the most recent usage of the power was in 2016 over how pro-independence elected lawmakers modified their oaths when swearing into office. The CCP essentially barred the elected lawmakers from taking their seats for not saying their oaths properly.

Under the one country two systems principle, Hong Kong is supposed to be self-governed in most aspects of its system other than foreign and military affairs are to be within the control of the Beijing government. However, the reality on the ground is that many aspects are being encroached by the CCP. As the Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR is pre-selected by the CCP, it would be difficult for any semblance of self-governance to occur. Some young people in Hong Kong in recent years are starting to seek independence from China. However, the realpolitik is that Hong Kong would never be able to gain independence so long as China's political system does not change. Besides the obvious challenge that such a call for secession would be a threat to China's sovereignty and might inspire other autonomous regions to seek such a move, Hong Kong depends on mainland China to survive. No leader in Hong Kong, freely elected or otherwise, would be reckless enough to declare the territory independent from China as Hong Kong depends on China for energy, food and water. Cutting off any of these essential supplies would plunge the territory into chaos and the CCP has shown that it is willing to use economic mechanisms to exert pressure on political issues. Moreover, China currently depends much lesser on Hong Kong for economic growth than Hong Kong is dependent on China for economic growth. The size of Hong Kong's economy is now less than 3% of China's as compared to more than 20% before 1997. International companies had based their Asia headquarters in Hong Kong because Hong Kong serves as a gateway to China. There are increasingly more avenues for which international investments and trade could be conducted with China without the intermediary of Hong Kong. The CCP could possibly and easily starve off Hong Kong's economy should there be any attempt to secede.

For Hong Kong, it has been “one country two systems” since being ceded to the British. Before 1997, it was a colony functioning under a system different from the UK. After 1997, it is a special administrative region under a different system from China. For more than a century, Hong Kong people have had to grapple with identity issues and a local government that takes order from a distant higher authority. From being apathetic about politics to regular protests and agitation for the right to elect their Chief Executive, the political attitude of the Hong Kong people has evolved significantly after 1997. The next section will examine the citizenship education and how it contributed to a more politically engaged younger generation.

## 5.2 Citizenship Education

For Hong Kong, issues of identity and citizenship permeates beyond the curriculum of citizenship education. One of the more contentious issue is the medium of instruction. Before 1997, most schools used English as the medium of instruction. However, after 1997, the education bureau mandated schools to adopt Cantonese as the medium of instruction, with some exceptions for those schools proving to have capabilities to teach in English. Hence the education system went from about 80% English-medium schools to about 75% Cantonese-medium schools in the transition years.

The main reason for such a change was that education experts advocated that the use of mother tongue for instruction would enhance learning and improve performance in school. Some argued that another reason was to build an identity breaking away from the colonial period. The adoption of Cantonese in turn created a different identity problem that Hong Kong faces now as language becomes a point of contention between those who are pro-mainland and those resisting the influence of mainland. After more than a decade of

relatively widespread adoption of Cantonese, the government started pushing for teaching to be conducted in Mandarin and simplified characters in 2008. This push for change in language then resulted in protests regarding the language policy as for many Hong Kong people, the use of Cantonese and traditional characters forms their identity and differentiate themselves from the mainland. For many of them, switching from English to Cantonese was natural as it was their native language that many uses in daily life. But the new change was about accommodating the demands of China and a repression of their culture and identity. Hence, now in Hong Kong, there is an older generation educated in English, a younger generation educated in Cantonese and a newer generation contending what language to be educated in.

Cantonese and Mandarin are both of Chinese origins which can use the same Chinese characters. In written form there are some differences but user of one would be able to understand the meaning of the other most of the time. In spoken form, both languages are very different, and speakers would not be able to understand each other without training. Simplified characters are derived from traditional characters but with lesser character strokes. For example, “country” is 国家 in simplified characters and 國家 in traditional character. The transformation of Chinese characters to the simplified version was introduced by Mainland China in the 1950’s and 1960’s in a bid to improve literacy rate in China. Since then, traditional characters are more widely used in Taiwan and Hong Kong while the rest of Chinese speaking world uses simplified characters. For some, rejection of simplified characters is thus seen as a rejection towards the CCP system.

A key contribution to Hong Kong’s citizenship education is the subject termed as “liberal studies” that secondary school students between the ages of 15 to 17 have to study

for. Liberal studies was first introduced in Hong Kong's education landscape by the British colonial government in 1992 to promote students' social awareness and to somewhat allay the concerns leading up to the eventual change in government. There were only slightly more than 10% of the secondary schools adopting the subject in 1997. It was only made mandatory in 2009. The subject is meant to broaden students' knowledge and covers content such as "Hong Kong today", "modern China", "globalisation" and "public health". Under "Hong Kong today", students learn about rule of law, socio-political participation and local identity. The intent of "liberal studies" is to foster independent thinking and develop multiple perspectives on contemporary issues.

Since then, the subject has been blamed for radicalising youths and causing the mass protests in 2014. While it may be a stretch to deem liberal studies as being the root to political radicalisation, it could be argued that it contributed to developing the political consciousness of Hong Kong's youths. Being exposed to different political systems and encouraged to think about the system that they are in meant that they are equipped with the vocabulary and analytical tools to participate in political activities if they choose to. In general, the youths in Hong Kong in the recent years are not as politically apathetic as the previous generations. They are more critical and demanding of the government. For many, it is no longer acceptable to simply keep the heads down and work for a living. Whether liberal studies has anything to do with the changes in political attitude is debatable.

Identity is an important factor in the legitimisation process when the government is perceived to be serving Chinese interests rather than the interests of Hong Kong people. Even while Hong Kong is a Chinese territory, when the people do not identify with the Chinese flag, the Chinese anthem and the Chinese political system, the Hong Kong government would



face an uphill task in legitimising their rule when they have to submit to the decisions of the CCP. The regular survey conducted by Hong Kong University regarding how the people of Hong Kong identify as showed that the Chinese identity reached a peak in 2008 at 38% and had been decreasing since. Most people, particularly the young, surveyed identify as “Hong Konger”.

Even though the youths have never lived in colonial governed Hong Kong, the possibility of being directly governed by the CCP is sufficient to drive many to imagine that the colonial government was better. There is also the positive reinforcement that the UK government is much more democratic as compared to the CCP. Be it a colony or special administrative region, the people of Hong Kong had forged a unique local identity for the last century and it would be an uphill task for a distant political master to foist their will on the Hong Kong people.

### 5.3 Media

Hong Kong's free media system however is a relatively new development as compared its colonial history. Going back to the beginning of colonial rule, the colonial government enacted various restrictive laws in order to secure its rule. Seditious Publications Ordinance was enacted in 1907 while Printers and Publication Ordinance was enacted in 1927 to prevent publications from printing materials that were against colonial rule. In the post-World War II period, the struggle for control of China between the Nationalists and Communists spilled over to Hong Kong and the colonial government enacted Emergency Regulations (Amendment) Ordinance in 1949 and Control of Publication (Consolidation) Ordinance in 1951 to rein in the media. There was fear that the spread of nationalism in China could influence the people in Hong Kong to demand for independence. Despite these

laws, the close proximity to China meant that many publications still dealt with Chinese political issues although most were still market driven and dedicated to providing local infotainment (See Lai 2007 for additional details). The colonial government generally left the press alone to cancel out the influence between different factions supporting either the Communists or Nationalists as long as they did not question British sovereignty in Hong Kong.

Following the plateau of the political struggle between the Nationalists and Communists in the 1970s, the commercial focus of the media gradually became the operating principle. In addition, prior to 1960's, a large portion of the population comprised of refugees from China and thus interests were high for news regarding China. However, with the locally born baby boomers maturing, the media shifted its attention away from China's politics since fewer people were interested.

In the transitional period after 1997, the media, as with the majority of the people in Hong Kong, took a cautious approach and avoided being "too political" and "critical" due to uncertainties over what the Chinese government might do or how they might react to an overcritical media. Most media outlets became "depoliticized" and devoted more coverage to social and economic issues (Lee, 2005). However, with the show of solidarity by so many through the annual 1 July demonstrations, the press responded and as Lee (2005) noted:

*"Since 2002 the role of the press has become more important. It is relied upon by Hong Kong people to channel their discontent, scrutinize the government, and to set a policy agenda for the government. On the other hand, a weak HKSAR government, backed by its chief in Beijing, also looks upon the press for support for its policies and legitimacy."* (p.88)

The majority of media outlets in Hong Kong are privately owned and operated for profit while a few special-interest media are supported by the Chinese Communist Party or NGOs. Newspapers supported by the Chinese Communist Party have very low circulations and are mostly read by government officials and businessmen “for reference” (Lee, 2005) of the CCP’s position on important issues. Hong Kong has a public broadcasting media that is funded by the HKSAR and is not subjected to market pressures. Based on the model of British Broadcasting Corporation, its editorial decisions are independent of the government even though it receives public funding. However, the transfer of its director in 1999 following a controversial story on Taiwan led some to believe that the government was sending a message to the station to toe the line (Lai, 2007). Other than direct funding of publications, some argue that the Beijing government has also exerted influence on privately owned media outlets. In 2003, business owners of a few newspapers were co-opted into the CCP and their newspapers started to show a pro-China and pro-Hong Kong government stance in various issues such as Article 23 and the performance of the government.

However, even with the “repoliticization”, many are still not interested in politics and according to Lee (2005, p.85), “the majority of the audience simply does not care about the political stances of the media. People will buy media that provide what they perceive as good entertainment and soft information to meet their needs, regardless of whether they are pro-Beijing or anti-Beijing”. With this in mind, many media outlets simply pander to the bases and “some media are not as ‘civil’ as some liberal theorists would like to see” (Lee, 2005, p.81). Three of the newspapers with highest readership were focused on gossips and sensationalistic news. The culture of paparazzi is prevalent in Hong Kong and with a healthy (albeit declining) movie/TV industry; many publications zoom in on the private lives of the

celebrities. The decline in standards and pandering towards lowest denominators with paparazzi type of sensationalistic news prompted the HKSAR government to propose a press council with powers to regulate the media. However, the industry opposed strongly and the compromised was reach with the setting up of a self-regulatory press council in 2000 that composed of industry stakeholders.

## Chapter 6

### Taiwan

Taipei is most liberal and open amongst the four cities studied in this thesis. The inclusion of Taipei in the study would offer a valuable dimension to the analysis as it progressed from an authoritarian regime to its democratic circumstance now. Taiwan's economy was once amongst the fastest growing in Asia but now has matured and slow growth has placed pressure on the government. Influences from mainland China, from both the past and in the future, would also be important to how the Taiwanese perceive the government.

#### 6.1 Political History Context

The island of Taiwan has seen a multitude of invaders and colonists in the last few centuries that had contributed to the Taiwanese identity, particularly the Japanese. The Japanese took possession of Taiwan after the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and ruled over it for 50 years. Japanese influence is still strongly felt in many aspects of Taiwanese society but despite Japanese occupation over so many decades, there is an absence of bitterness amongst Taiwanese that is common in mainland China. The Taiwan government does not tap on antagonism towards neighbouring countries like what the CCP depends on. Rather the bogeyman that some Taiwanese politicians rely on is the CCP, which still sees Taiwan as a breakaway province to be brought back into China's rule.

Since the end of Second World War in 1945, Taiwan has been governed as the Republic of China when Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) took over the governance of Taiwan after the war. The initial decades under the rule of KMT had been tempestuous as the KMT set about to establish itself in Taiwan. The prior Japanese colonist government had

been strict but brought about much development in Taiwan. Hence while many welcomed the KMT's arrival in Taiwan from a historical Chinese roots view, the KMT's legitimacy was short-lived as a liberator once it was apparent how corrupt and incompetent the KMT was.

KMT's post-war rule started an influx of mainlanders seeking refuge in Taiwan as the Chinese Civil War raged on. The large influx of new immigrants meant replacing locals in the government and civil service as many in the new KMT government were from the mainland as well. Friction nonetheless was created between the new arrivals and the established residents as the KMT practised political patronage. Corruption was rampant and inflation was high with economic mismanagement, leading to widespread resentment of the KMT government. The resentment led to widespread protests and eventually a violent clampdown by the military in 1947 (also known as the 228 massacre) that resulted in (estimated between 5 to 28 thousand) thousands of death.

The KMT's full retreat into Taiwan in 1949 increased the influx of mainlanders to a few millions and also triggered the start of martial law as the KMT was guarding against the influence of communist and early settlers who were resistant towards KMT rule. For nearly four decades, martial law was imposed on Taiwan and the early period was also known as the "White Terror" period for its draconian laws and harsh treatment of political opposition. Opposition parties were banned, and the media was totally under the control of the KMT. KMT ruled under the one-party state ideology that Sun Yat-sen had founded the party on. The KMT could legitimise its oppressive rule through this period as there was CCP China at Taiwan's doorstep which was still raining artillery on one of Taiwan's far-flung islands on a regular basis. When a country faces existential crisis, a heavy-handed government who would

do everything it could to stand against the invasion would seem acceptable. Taiwan needed to stand behind a government who would deter the invasion from China.

The KMT also relied on dividing and conquering to manage the people. While more than 95% of Taiwan's population are Han Chinese, there are still perceived differences. Within the majority Han Chinese ethnic group, there is the distinction of "Waishenren" (loosely translated as "outsiders" or "from outside province") and "Benshenren" (loosely translated as "locals" or "from this province"). The distinction basically separates those earlier Han Chinese settlers who arrived in Taiwan before the Japanese occupation (there was a restriction on immigration during the Japanese occupation) from those later Han Chinese settlers who arrived during KMT's retreat to Taiwan. The earlier settlers tend to be Southern Chinese while the later settlers were more likely Northern Chinese. It should be noted that other than usage of different Chinese dialects, one would not be able to easily tell the two groups apart other than asking them about their ancestry. The KMT leadership then stacked the government and civil service with "Waishenren", marginalising "Benshenren" in the process. Keeping a large group happy while letting the sub-groups pit against each other allowed the KMT to govern through pork barrel politics. The remaining population are made up of aborigines of about a dozen different tribes who had been on the island a few centuries before the arrival of the Han Chinese. These tend to be supportive of the KMT as the KMT patronage system capitalised on the animosity that the aborigines had against the Benshenren when they first settled in Taiwan.

While there was widespread cronyism during KMT's rule, the grease kept the economy going and the KMT also brought about rapid economic development in the 60's and 70's. The KMT initiated many infrastructure projects that gave Taiwan's economy a boost

and brought about investments that helped grow the export-oriented manufacturing industry. Taiwan's middle class grew significantly during the 70's and with the growth, many middle-class citizens began to push for democracy in Taiwan. This coincided with Taiwan's crisis on the international stage as it lost its seat at the UN to China. Therein, it precipitated the changes in diplomatic ties as many countries ditched Taiwan for China. Taiwan's diplomatic ties become informal as embassies become informal "trade offices" to serve consulate functions. The KMT now had to justify its rule externally as well so as to gain the support of democratic countries. Hence, as Chiang Chin-kuo took over the leadership of Taiwan after the death of Chiang Kai-shek, the younger Chiang initiated gradual democratic reforms to legitimise KMT's rule to both citizens internally and audiences externally.

The first opposition party, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was formed in 1986 and allowed to run in the elections in that same year. This marked the beginnings of the "blue" vs "green" politics that Taiwan sees today. Pan-green parties are led by the DPP and consist of parties that run on localist and pro-independence ideas while pan-blue parties are led by KMT who adopt a pro-unification stance. With the passing of Chiang Chin-kuo, Lee Teng-hui carried on the democratization reforms and eventually won the first direct presidential elections in 1996. Lee was the first to acknowledge KMT's wrong doings during the white terror period and worked to reverse many of the policies that caused resentment amongst the people.

While Lee Teng-hui was open to political reforms, the KMT was not ready to cut Taiwan off from China. In 1992, the governments of both China and Taiwan met for the first time in decades and came to an outcome known as "1992 Consensus" that affirms there is one China. However, both sides' interpretation of China is different. Henceforth sets off a



see-saw relationship between the two governments as Taiwan elects different parties into power. Chen Shui-bian became the first non-KMT president in 2000 and his presidency put the cross-strait relations on hold as Chen was not align with the view of one China. Chen's presidency saw more emphasis on growing the Taiwanese identity and advocated for the independence of Taiwan. The CCP saw Chen as creeping towards declaration of Taiwan's independence and .

Following Chen's presidency, KMT's Ma Ying-jeou came into power in 2008. Ma resume regular interactions with China again as he focused on establishing trade links with China. Ma Ying-jeou's pro-China policies eventually led to discontent amongst many youths as they see the policies as undermining their sovereignty and identity. Economically, there is also the issue that wages in Taiwan for fresh graduates had been depressed for years and closer ties with China would open up to keener competition with millions more mainlanders. As the KMT attempted to fast-track a trade agreement with China through legislature, a protest movement (known as the Sunflower movement) led by students stormed the legislature building and occupied it for weeks, demanding the government withdraw from the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement. Just before stepping down, Ma Ying-jeou met with Xi Jinping in Singapore. That was the first time two leaders from China and Taiwan met since 1945. The meeting resulted in mixed reactions from Taiwan as some see it as an opportunity to further develop economic ties while others see it as a yet another betrayal of Taiwan's sovereignty by Ma.

On the back of popular discontent towards KMT's pro-China policies, DPP's Tsai Ing-wen was elected in 2016 as the first female president of Taiwan. Again, Taiwan swung away from China and took a more pro-independence stance. While Tsai was careful not to

spell out directly, her policies indicate that she wanted to reduce dependence on China's economic clout and pushed for more presence on the international front. China began to squeeze Taiwan through poaching of Taiwan's few diplomatic relations and shutting out Taiwan from international organisations. China also began a charm offensive for Taiwanese, welcoming Taiwanese to work and live in China with minimal paperwork needed.

Like Hong Kong, Taiwan depends significantly on China for economic growth. Be it tourism or trade, China's market size is the main factor for Taiwan's growth. The CCP has shown that it is willing to use China's economic clout for political gains. Organisations from all over the world ranging from airlines, retailers, manufacturers and education institutes have had to bow to CCP's pressure in taking the position that Taiwan is not an independent country. Media artistes too have to toe the line regarding comments on Taiwan and Hong Kong as many have been banned from performing in China for espousing pro-independence views. Now just a handful of countries recognises Taiwan as a country and its status in the world is precarious. China would always factor into the legitimisation of Taiwan's government and the local media would be a multiplier of influence in the mix.

Taiwan was last ruled by a mainland China government more than a century ago under imperial China. The history and connection with the current CCP government is so distant that some in Taiwan reject the term "reunification" and argue that it is "unification" that China is seeking since Taiwan has never been governed by CCP. The spectre of China's influence will always be around even as Taiwan's national identity has grown stronger over the years. The allure of China's enormous consumer market is simply too much to be ignored. However, as the CCP exerts a tighter hold on Hong Kong, even those who are motivated by economic gains are taking the position that it would be difficult to seek

unification but would prefer friendlier relations with China that maintain the status quo of different governments across the Taiwan Strait.

## 6.2 Citizenship Education

The loss of civil war and retreat of KMT sets the stage for Taiwanese politics and shapes the media and education landscape in recent history. KMT governed Taiwan under martial law after the retreat, still holding on to hopes of reuniting with China eventually. Some of the main policies of the government in that period were to prevent the spread of communism and to build a common Chinese identity with mainland China. This mentality then set the national policies for media and education. Books and songs were then tightly control to meet the guidelines. School textbooks taught the history and culture of China rather than Taiwanese history. Taiwan's history was taught as a subset of the history of China until 1997.

During the early KMT martial law years, there was also an emphasis to undo the influence of Japanese colonial years. The Japanese occupation had left a deep impact on the local culture as the Japanese had governed efficiently and fairly. While Taiwanese did not want to be ruled by the Japanese, there was no deep-seated resentment. The Japanese rapidly expanded the industries for which to benefit Japan but the same policy helped to grow Taiwan's middle class as well. With that, there was sufficient interactions for the various aspects of Japanese culture to diffuse into Taiwan. To solidify KMT's rule, KMT adopted "re-sinicization" policies to erase the effects of Japanese colonial history.

KMT's narrative in the early years was that Taiwan was a province under Republic of China and KMT was building up to unify with mainland China. The people of Taiwan hence needed to identify as Chinese and have national identity as Chinese rather than Taiwanese. Much of the curriculum centred on inculcating in students a sense of responsibility of recovering the lost territory of mainland China and fighting against the communists to free their fellow compatriots on the mainland. In trying to promote a national identity that stems from mainland China, the KMT ended up marginalizing local cultures. The unification focused education meant that Northern Chinese language and culture took an outsized role than overshadowed local culture. This marginalized a significant group of Taiwanese and bred resentment towards the KMT.

Post martial law period, because of Lee Teng-hui's background as a Benshenren, the government began to downplay nationalistic and ideological content that centred around China. Instead, focus shifted to creating local identities and exploring local issues and characteristics. Taiwan's history and study of Taiwan society no longer subsume under the big China umbrella. In the most recent changes, citizenship education broadens its scope and allowed schools to partly develop their own curriculum to suit local needs. The overall aim is no longer about nationalism but developing students' critical thinking and social skills.

Like Hong Kong, Taiwan faces contentions regarding language policies. In the 1950's, when KMT was consolidating its influence in Taiwan, there was a ban on the use of dialects in the media and official settings. Mandarin is known as "common/standard language" in China while in Taiwan it is known as "national language", signifying the level of emphasis the KMT placed on Mandarin. The ban on dialects was only lifted in 1991 and although Mandarin Chinese is still the official language, there are more efforts in promoting

and conserving local languages/dialects in recent years. The vibrant political culture has also fostered a drive to be as inclusive as possible for politicians and thus more resources are devoted into emphasizing and preserving of local and aborigine culture. Taiwan Min-nan language (southern China origin) has also been designated as an official language

Over the years, the distinction between Waishenren and Benshenren has gradually faded with fewer Taiwanese being originally from Mainland China. Even offsprings of Waishenren who should be categorised as Waishenren do not identify with that label. There are also more efforts in promoting and acknowledging ethnic minorities in Taiwan since the turn of the century so as to create a more inclusive society that acknowledges differences. The issues of identity and citizenship is now becoming a generation issue as the younger generation generally identify as Taiwanese (Jiang, 2017).

### 6.3 Media

As previously mentioned, Taiwan was under martial law from post-World-War-II until 1987 when then-President Chiang Ching-Kuo lifted the draconian rule. The martial law period was marked by numerous political upheavals both domestically and internationally that pressured Chiang to introduce political reforms and liberalization so as to legitimize the Taiwanese government both domestically and internationally. Through gradual liberalization, as the ban on political parties was lifted, publication of newspapers was liberalized and elections to various public offices were implemented.

As highlighted by Hallin and Mancini (2004), a society's media system and its politics are usually closely related. Taiwan's media landscape too is shaped by its polarised

politics. Taiwan's polarised politics is not divided along the usual left versus right wing ideologies but along perceived ethnicity difference that is historically charged.

Similar to how the KMT controlled the use of dialects in education, TV and radio programming were also restricted in the use of Taiwanese dialects and only Chinese Mandarin could be used. This is due to KMT's view that Taiwanese dialects are associated with independence inclination and KMT's aim was to promote a closer culture with mainland China, still holding hope of returning to governance in mainland. As the KMT loosen its grip on the media, Taiwan's media has developed and changed along with the building of national identity (Hsu, 2014b). Dialects regained its use in the media as Taiwanese stressed on their national identity.

In terms of media control prior to 1987, while publishers did not need to seek approval prior to printing, the "National Mobilization Law" during the martial law period allowed the government to seize printed newspapers if anything printed was considered to be threatening national interests. "Publication Law" also regulated the registration of publications and number of pages that could be printed. In terms of electronic media, "Broadcasting and Television Law of 1976" controlled ownership, finance and structure and programming. The government essentially controlled all the television stations, radio stations and main newspapers through ownership prior to 1987.

The loss of the UN seat to China in 1971 and student movements campaigning for democracy in 70's and 80's pressured the government to gradually liberalize so as to maintain its legitimacy. Since the political reforms after 1987, the transformation of the media landscape has been astonishing fast. The number of radio stations grew from 33 before

1993 to 174 in 2003. The number of newspapers stood at 514 in 2003 and there are four national television stations and hundreds of cable channels available to the people (Rawnsley, 2004).

While it is apparent that the media landscape prior to 1987 was highly controlled and lacked freedom, it did not mean a total lack of alternative voices in that period. There were various outlets that transmitted messages that were not permitted by the government and Taiwan built up a culture of alternative media in that period. Alternative media grew in part due to the lack of mainstream media avenues for opposition political parties. Rawnsley (1998) pointed out that “to clearly understand the role of the dissident media, it is crucial to appreciate that since 1951 the KMT did allow at least a semblance of electoral democracy to flourish, albeit only at the local level and subject to strict political control” (p.111). The regulations in that era denied access to mainstream media for those in the opposition parties. The lack of access to mainstream media meant that many of the local politicians running against the KMT had to rely on underground media. These include political journals, magazines and underground radio stations. There were even underground television stations that broadcasted locally in different counties and cities.

Alternative media was also able to grow because there was a certain level of tolerance from the KMT government as long as these media did not attempt to organize collective actions against the KMT. As “although they articulated views which were prohibited by the myriad of laws created and administered by the KMT, their publication was tolerated until they began to engage in more concerted and organized activity, such as the formation of parties. Then the government would intervene and suppress them, often gaoling the publishers or contributors” (Rawnsley, 1998, p. 112). While the government would close

down these operations on a regular basis, financial support from political supporters from the pro-independence camp meant that they could play the cat-and-mouse game with the government without worries about market pressure.

The practise or culture of seeking alternative media was cultivated and has remained been strong in Taiwan. For example, in 1988, a street demonstration in Taipei that turned violent was portrayed as rioting of farmers and students by the main newspapers and television networks. However, camcorder recordings by two NGOs suggested that the police and soldiers had started the riot by provoking and attacking the protestors. Videotapes were made, circulated and widely viewed amongst the people, providing an alternative representation of what happened (Rawnsley, 1998). This event later led to calls for reforms in the media with many demanding that the KMT withdraw their involvement with the television networks.

In January 1988, the restrictions on publication of newspapers were lifted and many new publications sprouted out in response. However, newspaper printing is still dependent on market demand and many of the new independent publications folded due to inability to attract advertisements and readers. This led to a consolidation of the newspaper market to two main groups. This also led to a creation of 2 groups with different ideologies and bias in news coverage from both camps (Chen, 1998). The polarised political scene created two market segments which the media reacted to accordingly.

Freedom House finally classified Taiwan as a “completely free” country in 1997 and since then Taiwan has regularly been held up as an example for smooth transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime. Freedom of the press, however, does not



necessarily equate to quality or trustworthy content. A free media market meant an intense competition for eyeballs and advertising dollars. On top of bias coverage according to their subscribed ideologies, many media outlets also resorted to yellow journalism in a bid to attract readers and viewers. The deluge of yellow journalism in a free media environment is not unique and is similar to what Thompson (1995) described as he criticised Habermas' idealistic version of public sphere that failed to take into account the "scurrilous and sensationalistic content of many of its products" (p.72). Rawsley (2004) also pointed how the media saturated environment led to personality-focused politics rather than focusing on issues and policies. Even with a seemingly free lack of real dialogue and participation by the people.

Another key chapter in the overhaul of the media industry was when the first non-KMT president, Chen Shui Bian, was elected in 2002. Chen directed the government to examine ownership in television companies and mandated that political parties and politicians are not allowed to hold significant shares in television companies (Rawsley, 2004, p.8). Other than direct ownership, the KMT was also seen as influencing the media market via advertising budget of the state as only KMT friendly media outlets were given government contracts.

As pointed out by Fuchs (2014), "while mainland China, Taiwan's cross-strait rival, continues to keep a tight leash on its media, Taiwan's freewheeling television, print, and web media — and their penchant for superficial reportage — are causing antipathy among a growing number of its inhabitants". Hallin and Mancini (2004) too noted the antipathy, observing that "Polarized Pluralist systems, finally are characterized by unequal consumption of public information, with a fairly sharp division between the politically active population that heavily consumes political commentary in the press, and a politically inactive population

that consumes little political information” ( p.298). For the Taiwanese, it would appear that the media is not merely a neutral site for politics to be mediated. Media itself is a political issue that requires reform and professionalization.

As can be seen with the initial examination of the countries, restrictions can take many forms and media freedom for the sake of freedom may not naturally yield the positive effects that many have theorised. While both China and Singapore have restrictive environments, Singapore relies more on self-censorship through uncertainties and perpetuating of “control parodies” (Stern & Hassid, 2012). China on the other hand has a more direct approach that would be keenly felt by the people. Perceptions towards the political communication control thus might be vastly different.

Whereas for Taiwan and Hong Kong, while they are categorized as free for their media environment, the freedom did not naturally translate into the positive outcomes that many liberal theorists preached about. Allowing the market to solely decide what will be produced will likely result in a race to satisfy the lowest denominator with sensationalistic content. The freedom from control frequently leads to commodification or commercialisation that may not necessarily be beneficial to the public sphere (Dalgren, 2001). As can be seen by UK’s Leveson Inquiry, regulation of the media is contentious but many still think that some form of regulation is needed for the media to act responsibly. Even the free market that capitalists preach about requires laws to regulate behaviours, so expecting the media to act responsibly in the absence of regulations would be too optimistic. A closer examination of perceptions of communication environment other than degree of freedom would be necessary. More so for Taiwan is the issue of media company ownership and influence of foreign agents in the media. As the CCP seeks to unify with Taiwan, one strategy that the

CCP adopts is shaping the narrative in Taiwan's media through indirect ownership of media companies or advertising dollars (Hsu, 2014a). Being susceptible to foreign influences is a significant weakness of free media environments and must be an aspect that should be highlighted.

## Chapter 7

### 7.1 Introduction for research design

Much of the research in political communication tend to be conducted in the Western context and from the deliberative democracy perspective whereby freedom of expression is typically assumed. Any government in the Western industrialised countries that attempts to diminish freedom of expression would likely suffer a loss of support from the populace. In the literature for democracy, many have written on the importance of free speech for citizenship. The unencumbered discussion of public affairs in public sphere is argued to have a positive impact on citizenship. Commonly given rationales are that freedom of expression allows the governed to participate and communicate their needs to the government (Norris, 2000; Scheufele, Shanahan, & Kim, 2002) and it could also act as a counterbalance towards those in power by being able to expose corruption and misuse of power (Siegle, Weinstein, & Halperin, 2004; Chowdhury, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2010). However is the process only applicable for democratic societies or would the process of open public discussion that is part of the foundation of democracy also result in positive impact in different governance systems or is it an inculcated value that only democratic regimes favour?

In many Asian countries, however, governmental control or manipulation of the media landscape is common and appears to be tolerated by the citizens. Freedom of expression thus might be viewed differently in different societies since political systems, cultural and historical backgrounds, and demands for democratic processes may be different from the West. In a quantitative analysis of 44 states, Norris and Inglehart (2010) found that the people in states with restrictive media environment tend to be more supportive of their government as there are no opposing messages that the people in pluralistic environments would face. Chen and Shi (2001) on the other hand found that the single editorial policy in China had a negative impact on trust in government in the period after the Tianamen incident.

In other words, while the Chinese government could quell unrests and dissenting voices forcibly, their propaganda policies failed to shore up support for the government.

Pointing to the examples of South Korea and Taiwan, there are some who expect that as countries and its citizens become wealthier, there would be a natural demand for more personal freedoms and political change. However, the demand for change does not seem to be similar for every country and China's infamous Great Firewall is still standing despite its citizens becoming much wealthier over the last two decades. Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House both reported increasing governmental control of the media in many Asian countries while the most recent study on internet filtering by OpenNet Initiative (2011) reported that in Asia, a "trend of increasing controls in the context of growing connectivity is emerging in the region as a whole" (p.233).

With increasingly more voices (see "The Economist," 2016), both outside and within Asia, calling for more freedom of expression, there is thus a need for closer examination of perceptions of political communication control and how it could impact on governance within the context of Asia. Keeping in mind that countries in Asia consist of different regime types, an analytical approach via the commonly used liberal democratic lens would thus be incongruous. While political systems might be different in the different countries, however, regardless of the type of regime, many would agree that all contemporary states are based on or influenced by the principle of popular sovereignty that requires the consent, explicit or otherwise, of the people to stay in power. Based on this view, popular perception on the legitimacy of the government would affect the stability and efficacy of governments. Perception of legitimacy is also theorised to increase compliance with government policies and studies have found empirical data supporting the claim (Levi & Sacks, 2009; Tyler & Huo, 2002). As for contributing factors of political legitimacy, "good governance, poverty reduction and provision of civil liberties" (Gilley, 2006, p.518) are some of the factors found

to have an impact. Some theorists (Scharpf, 1999; Backstrand, 2006) differentiate contributing factors into input and output factors, with input legitimacy pertaining to judgement of processes in governance and output legitimacy pertaining to judgement of performance such as economic growth and provision of services. Few would doubt that the remarkable economic performance over the last few decades in Asia contributed to the support and stability of the governments. However, as economic low hanging fruits had been reaped and industrialisation has reached a mature stage for many countries, economic growth can no longer be expected to maintain at such high levels. As demonstrated by history, no country can enjoy perpetual high economic growth and will eventually taper off to low growth. With that inevitability in mind, it is all the more important to examine the input factors (governance and civil liberties) rather than merely relying on outputs factors (outcomes of the economy) for legitimacy. While it may seem that political communication control is only one dimension out of many others in the process of governance, political communication control may also influence perceptions on other dimensions since information dissemination and opinion formation on other dimensions are affected by political communication control.

This study aims to examine the relationship between perceptions of freedom of expression and political legitimacy within East Asia. Using four Asian cities (Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taipei) as case studies, they will be comparatively analysed as these societies have different levels of governmental control of speech/media while having similarities in terms of economic development and cultural roots. Importantly, the media environment in the societies to be analysed provide a large contrast and are often ranked vastly different by international civil society organizations. To illustrate, Freedom House in 2015 ranked China 186<sup>th</sup>, Singapore 149<sup>th</sup>, Hong Kong 76<sup>th</sup> and Taiwan 44<sup>th</sup> out of 199 countries in terms of press freedom (Freedom House, 2016).

While political systems may be different for the case studies in this thesis, the rationale for this study is that in the contemporary world, regardless of political system, the principle of popular sovereignty is universal (Beetham, 1991a). Popular sovereignty is the principle that the legitimacy of the state is conferred and sustained by the will of the people. Even though not all the cities examined in this study have the practice of universal suffrage, their claim to power and authority is still based on the will of the people. Taking China as an example, China's constitution reflects the claim in Article 2 which states that "All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people". This is also a point that is acknowledged by the Chinese leaders, as affirmed by Wen Jiabao in 2011 with his quote "国之命在人心" (translated as "the fate of the nation lies in the hearts of the people") becoming a catchphrase in China (Bandurski, 2011). Political legitimacy as conferred by the people would also be valued by political elites across different political systems since it lowers the cost of enforcing compliance and implementation of public policies. Hence, studying the relationship between popular perceptions of legitimacy and political communication control would be of greater relevance to a wider audience than examining freedom of expression via a democracy lens.

The descriptive view of political legitimacy is predominantly influenced by Max Weber whereby he argues that legitimacy is not a moral or normative judgement made by the investigator but an empirical report on the beliefs of the relevant agents concerned. As stated by Weber (1968, p. 263):

*"In general, it should be kept dearly in mind that the basis of every authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige"*

Weber identified three sources that fuel the beliefs of legitimacy, namely: rational-legal, traditional and charismatic. While Weber has considerably influenced the study on legitimacy, some (Dogan, 1992; Pitkin, 1972) pointed out the inadequacy of stripping the concept into merely sources of belief in contemporary society. Moreover, the approach is inadequate in explaining how or why regimes lose their legitimacy over time. Beetham (1991a) builds on Weber's work and argues that the three sources of legitimacy as theorised by Weber are inter-related rather than different sources. In his view, legitimacy consists of three dimensions that are all required to be present for legitimacy to be conferred. According to Beetham, power is legitimate when all three dimensions are met (p. 16):

- “ i) it conforms to established rules*
- ii) the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate; and*
- iii) there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation.”*

Differing from Weber's sources of beliefs, Beetham's multi-dimensional framework allows one to look beyond a “source” and examine closer the different dimensions in regimes that would strengthen or erode the perception of legitimacy. Beetham's approach is still rooted in the perspective of the people, as emphasized by Beetham (1991b, p.42) “Legitimacy is something conferred and confirmed by the actions of relevant subordinates”. Beetham's framework, by breaking the concept down to three dimensions, allows one to examine how changes in perception of legitimacy might come about in the different dimensions and what structural or cultural factors may be relevant in the different dimensions. This conceptualisation of legitimacy is relevant to this study since public communication within the political process is needed for justification of rules and signalling of consent.



Rather than simply thinking and discussing legitimacy simply as a virtue or quality that someone has as how Merelman (1966) defines as “a quality attributed to a regime by a population”, legitimacy should be analysed as a procedural concept that requires constant appraisal. When viewed as a quality, there is a tendency to view it as a solely dependent on the organisation that possesses it and in a dichotomous manner of either possessing it or not. However the dimensions of justification and consent that are propounded by Beetham offer support in thinking of legitimacy as a procedural concept. As a procedural concept that exists through interactions, the processes involved would matter as much as the constitutive attributes. Justification via common beliefs and consent are processes rather than attributes. These processes in turn are dependent on the communication environment of a society as information is disseminated and beliefs are contested amongst the people. Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2006) highlighted that legitimacy when viewed as a social process could explain why inefficiency and inequality in groups could exist and still maintain social stability. Habermas (1996) also pointed out that the process of deliberation and communication can be a legitimating force and serve a “socially integrative function” (p.304) while Huntington (1968) argues that government actions “are legitimate if they represent the outcome of a process of conflict and compromise in which all interest groups have participated” (p.27).

Having examined how the perception of legitimacy could be formed procedurally, how then could the perception of legitimacy manifest or be measured? The complexity of the concept means that there is no commonly accepted form of measure. Similar to how democracy is measured, researchers compute a series of items for which adhere with the theory they are investigating. The input/output legitimacy framework proposed by Scharpf (1999) is an approach that can provide guidance and is also similar to how some others had examined and measured legitimacy. Input legitimacy refers to procedural fairness,

participation of the people in policy formulation and transparency while output legitimacy refers to performance assessment of the government. Weatherford's (1992) model is based on multiple factors that can be grouped into two dimensions, namely "judgements of system performance" (output legitimacy) and "personal/citizen traits" (input legitimacy). Tyler (1997) examined legitimacy from a psychological perspective and identified two models which emphasize on different causal factors. In the resource-based model (output), instrumental factors such as favourability of outcomes and degree of influence over decisions are identified as causal factors. In the identity-based model (input), social status and intergroup relationship between dominant and subordinate are keys to the perception of legitimacy. Tyler highlighted that many had tended to focus on the resource-based model and there should be as much attention for the identity-based factors as when "people feel valued and respected, they defer to group authorities" (p.338). These measures are fundamentally proxy measures for which researchers theorised as the *causes* of legitimacy. Gilley (2006) too investigated these measures while also looked into the *effects* of legitimacy which include factors such as political stability, lower military spending and government support. Gilley utilised proxy questions from the Worlds Values Survey which pertain to support for the people in office and confidence in the government as measure for government support.

This thesis takes the descriptive view of legitimacy that is accorded by the people; that is how each individual view their own government. It would not be sensible to simply ask respondents whether they think their government is legitimate given that it is a largely academic concept that the average person would not think about. The questions used by Gilley (2006) are also not ideal as one may not support the people in office and still deem the government as legitimate. Following the guidance of literature, suitable proxy measures are thus used to demonstrate acceptance and support of the political system they are in rather

than specifically on the government in power. The survey questions used will be elaborated in the methods section.

Political communication and the media would then play an important role in this continuous process since the political actors involved would need to communicate and justify their decisions. When political communication is limited to state institutions and citizen participation is low, the performance of the government in delivering economic needs will play a greater role in the legitimization process. It would also mean that performance failures will be attributed to the state to a higher degree since policy making is no longer a negotiated outcome that involved the citizens or different communities within a country. There would be no sense of ownership or responsibility for the citizens for any policy. The involvement of citizens in policy formation or the provision of space for political participation could be a legitimizing process for governments. When policy making is conducted transparently and open to citizen participation, there could be a shared sense of responsibility of the outcome even if the outcome may not meet expectations of the citizens. As Searing et al. (2007) argued, “those who still disagree with public policies may nevertheless accept them because of their satisfaction with having been involved in discussions about these matters (p.588).” Habermas (1997, p.46) also pointed out, “consensus and majority rule are compatible only if the latter has an internal relation to the search for truth: public discourse must mediate between reason and will, between the opinion-formation of all and the majoritarian will-formation of the representatives.”

All things considered, the role of political communication could be an integral mechanism in the legitimization process since both the state and the polity needs information and discursive space to enable the assessment of legitimacy. Whether it is the conformation to laws, mutual justification of beliefs or the display of consent, all these require communication. Governments have always sought to influence the perceptions of the people

to strengthen their legitimacy through communication and authoritarian governments throughout history have always sought to control the mass media outlets. However control of the media has never guaranteed control of the people, as evidenced by political revolutions throughout history. Taking over of broadcast stations and shutting down of internet could only delay political revolutions and not prevent it. Some regimes with restrictive media environment may have a supportive populace but support may not be due to the lack of opposing messages. Rather, the support could be due to other causes and with the support, allowing them to wield control of the media. The different approaches in the treatment of media space that the four societies take in this study could provide insights on how the mechanism of political communication control works in the legitimation process as other contributory factors for legitimacy are taken into account.

While many have argued normatively the value of political discussions for legitimacy, few have empirical data to show the impact. Searing et al. (2007), through self-reported survey, showed that the “more that citizens discuss topics of public concern in public contexts, the more they are likely to see their government as accountable, attentive and legitimate.” This finding supports the view that legitimacy can be viewed as a continual process that can be strengthened with a conducive communications environment for the citizens. This study however, was conducted in the US and UK, which are liberal democratic in nature. It would be meaningful to examine whether inclusive political discussions in different governance systems would yield similar impact. The level of political communication control would have an impact on the people’s attitude and ability to discuss public issues (legitimation process), thereby providing this study with the theoretical impetus.

For the context of this study, it would be timely to examine the concept of legitimacy and its perception within East Asia as the global economy begins to slow. After the Second World War, the legitimacy of governments in developing countries is widely viewed as based

on economic growth and the ability to bring about wealth creation to the masses. This is evidenced in China's fixation on economic growth rate (Thompson, 2009) and the level of emphasis that the Chinese government places on communicating that to the public. Many other developing countries too depend on providing or achieving a certain level of economic growth so as to justify their rule. However, fast growing economies will eventually slow down and when that happens, regimes which are unable to respond appropriately and in a timely manner could face political instability. As can be seen with China, it "presented 8% gross domestic product (GDP) growth as a threshold below which the country's economy could not fall, if it hoped to maintain social stability" (Rein, 2013). No country in history, however, had been able to sustain high rate of growth perpetually and when the slowdown eventually begins, governments would have to manage unfulfilled expectations and the socio-economic problems associated with slow economic growth. As maturing countries face increasing levels of unemployment and income disparity, legitimacy that is dependent on economic performance would weaken. Hence it is important to understand legitimacy as a continuous process on which the relationships and expectations between the dominant and the subordinate is formed, justified and communicated.

In order to compare the case studies meaningfully, the societies selected comprise of predominantly population and culture of ethnic Han Chinese descent. This could minimise effects that could be due to cultural and ethnicity differences. In education research, these societies are also frequently grouped together as "Confucian heritage cultures" for the purpose of analysis and comparison (e.g. see Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Inglehart and Welzel (2010) constructed a "global cultural map" using data from the World Values Survey study and these societies are grouped together under the "Confucian" culture category. Based on "Traditional/Secular Rational" and "Survival/Self-Expression" dichotomies, these societies are "cultural neighbours" that score high on secular-rational and survival values. "Survival

values” place emphasis on economic and physical security while “self-expression values” give high priority to participation in decision-making in economic and political life. It should be highlighted that according to Inglehart and Welzel, scoring high on “survival” meant that respondents of these societies valued “self-expression” lesser. In terms of economic development, based on Human Development Index, all these cities are classified under the “very high” category. Together, these demonstrated that the four case studies have many similar features, thus allowing for a more meaningful comparison.

While cultural values and economic development in the four cities are on a comparable level, the freedom of expression situations in the four cities provide for contrast across the spectrum as mentioned previously. The massive media market of China creates an appearance that China has a vibrant and varied sources of information but all mainstream media outlets are directly or indirectly controlled by the CCP. (See Zhao, 2004). Many urban Chinese are aware of the controls that the CCP has on the media. The CCP is not coy about the control and openly declares that the media serves as the mouthpiece of the party. This is aligned with the Marxist view on the role of the press. Chines president, Xi Jinping, just recently reminded that the media must be share the same surname as the party, which means media is of the same family and under the direction of party leaders (Bloomberg News, 2016). Chinese citizens are also well aware of censorship and many has rationalised the strict control as essential for the harmony of the society. In fact censorship and harmony has become a sort of a synonym since public officials often justify the policy as essential for maintenance of social harmony. While all local media outlets are connected to the CCP in one way or another, the massive market does provide variation to some extent in terms of willingness to push the boundaries of control. Many have the impression that media outlets in southern China are bolder in their reporting and Hong Kong-based Phoenix Television is

appreciated for deviating from the usual CCTV-like all positive content. This study focuses on the city of Beijing for comparison as it is the political capital for China.

Hong Kong has usually been regarded to have a free media environment and was ranked favourably in terms of media freedom. The colonial government had not placed much restrictions on the industry and free market had allowed the media industry to flourish with multiple newspapers and broadcast stations. However, in recent years the image of an independent media has changed. While the local government has not placed any direct restrictions on the industry, Hong Kong residents are worried about the influence of China and are wary of the surreptitious actions that the Chinese government might take. Most recently, incidents such as the acquisition of the largest local English broadsheet, South China Morning Post, by a businessman from mainland China and the detaining of book publishers added to the apprehension. Freedom House's latest report on media freedom highlighted Beijing's "creeping control over Hong Kong media".

Singapore's small media market meant that it could not support many media companies and over the years, two main companies have emerged. One company is directly owned by the government while the other is public listed with management shares that may only be transferred with the approval of the government, giving the government control over key management positions. Aside from local companies, foreign media can operate without much interference but faces threats on curtailment of circulation or advertisement if it runs afoul with the government. Libel suits were more common in the 1990's while licensing schemes that require substantial monetary bonds are the new way to ensure media toe the line.

Taiwan has the freest communication environment of the four societies studied. Other than common decency laws and influencing through advertising dollars, the government does

not impose much restrictions on the media. However, similar to Hong Kong, Taiwan's media also face influences from China in recent years (Hsu, 2014) either through advertising dollars or pressure on media owners who have economic interests on both sides of the straits. It also suffers from the perception of low brow journalism that is based on scandals, sensationalism and gossip. Many Taiwanese think that the local media panders to the lowest denominator, concentrating their coverage on personalities, scandals and violence while lacking an international perspective in their content. This study focuses on the city of Taipei for comparison as it is the political capital for Taiwan.

The next section will report on a survey conducted with university students in the four cities. Survey items include questions that relate to both performance and process legitimacy to help illuminate how the different communications environments affect people in the four cities.

## 7.2 Survey Method

This research conducted a survey (n=830) of university students from the four cities. The survey was conducted over 6 months between November 2014 to April 2015 via a paper and pen self-administered method. Student assistants were placed at public areas of universities (such as cafeterias and library entrances) in the cities to recruit respondents. No personal identifier information were collected to ensure the privacy of the respondents and only basic demographic information such as gender, family income and academic major of respondents were collected. Respondents are filtered to ensure that they have resided in the respective cities for at least 10 years and are currently studying in a university.

The demographics of the survey respondents can be referred in Table 1. There are more females than males as is common in most survey studies. This could also be due to a gender gap with more females enrolled in universities. The mean age of respondents in the four cities are close to each other and Singapore has the highest mean age as male



Singaporeans have to undergo 2 years of compulsory military service before starting university education.

For the measure of perception of legitimacy, the questions “Over the long run, our system of government is capable of solving the problems our country faces”, “A system like ours, even if it runs into problems deserves the people’s support” and “I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of” are used. It is acknowledged that legitimacy as a concept is much more complex than could be captured by a few survey questions. However, as mentioned in the literature review, there is no common measure for political legitimacy and researchers rely on proxy measures that conceptually (for example willingness to pay taxes and adhering to laws) that fits their theoretical reasoning. This thesis takes the position of descriptive legitimacy that focuses on it being accorded by the people and, hence, questions relating to support of the political system provides the most suitable proxy measure for descriptive concept of legitimacy. Cronbach’s alpha for these three items is 0.751, which indicates acceptable internal consistency.

### 7.3 Findings & Analysis

Table 3.2 presents the mean and standard deviation values for survey items that this chapter will discuss on and regress against perception of legitimacy. As indicated in the table, assessment of political system, frequency of political talk and assessment of media freedom are computed from the sum of two to three items. Assessment of economy (both for the country and own family) is included to account for output or performance legitimacy for which many commonly attribute as a key reason for political stability. For the examination of freedom of expression, items include whether respondents believe media freedom is important and assessments of how free and representative the media are. Other measures include commonly examined constructs of political interest, political efficacy, authoritarian orientation and individualist/collectivist attitude.

The lower mean values for assessment of media freedom in Beijing and Singapore corresponds with media freedom rankings according to Freedom House and Reporters without Borders, verifying that respondents are aware of the controls. This signals that respondents on the whole are quite aware of the level of media freedom that they have and are not living in a bubble created by the strict controls. In this current information age, it is unlikely students in higher education would be entirely clueless about the controls. It is why they accept or rationalise the lack of media freedom that needs to be further explored. Table 3. shows the percentage of respondents in each city choosing a more liberal position for questions relating to freedom of expression. When the question is framed to include consideration of political stability, Hong Kong and Taipei shows a larger drop in respondents in choosing a more liberal position. This suggests that more respondents in Beijing and Singapore has already internalised the justification that media control is needed for political control even without prompting. Comparing between general control of ideas to be discussed in society and control of media, Beijing and Singapore show a difference of about 10% more respondents thinking that the media should be free while Hong Kong and Taipei shows a jump of 24 to 28%. This shows that in the consideration of control of communication, more respondents in Hong Kong and Taipei think that the media plays a more important role.

In Table 4., results are presented for linear regression examining correlation of perception of legitimacy in the four cities with the explanatory variables in Table 2. Standardized coefficients are reported with standard error in parentheses. There is no variable that is significant in all four cities. Assessment of country's economic condition, authoritarian orientation, assessment of media freedom and assessment of freedom of speech are significant in three of four cities. First in examining performance based legitimacy, assessment of economic conditions mattered at the country level for Beijing, Singapore and Taipei. Assessment of own family's economic condition is not a significant variable across

all four cities, indicating that respondents do not judge the government based on personal circumstances.

Commonly examined concepts such as political interest, political efficacy and individualist/collectivist orientation were not significant in the cities other than for Hong Kong. Curiously, authoritarian orientation is significant for every city other than Beijing.

A contradiction, appears to occur with Beijing's respondents as a preference of lower media freedom (as shown by a coefficient of -0.273) and better assessment of freedom of speech (coefficient 0.204) predicts better perception of political system. 3rd person effect (McLeod, 1997) can be explained here in that people are upset when they feel that their ability to freely express their opinion is curtailed but for the media, they think that some control in the mass media is good for the society as others may require the protection from misinformation. This research has also collected focus group data which corroborated with this inference that there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person effect for a substantial number of respondents in Beijing.

Another contradiction pertains to Taipei's negative correlation between assessment of media freedom and perception of legitimacy (See Table 4.). It would appear that there can be too much media freedom if media professionals do not perform responsibly within an unrestricted environment. As pointed out by journalist, Chris Fuchs (2014), "while mainland China, Taiwan's cross-strait rival, continues to keep a tight leash on its media, Taiwan's freewheeling television, print, and web media — and their penchant for superficial reportage — are causing antipathy among a growing number of its inhabitants". When asked whether the media in their city should have more or less freedom, Taipei is the only city with many more respondents selecting the "lesser" option (See Figure 1.) while other cities mostly answered stay the same or more.

The hypothesis as set out by Searing et al. (2007) that as the more citizens discuss social and political issues, the more they would see their government as accountable and legitimate did not pan out in this study. None of the cities show significant correlation between frequency of political talk and perception of political system, suggesting that simply having more frequent discussions is not going to aid in improving perception of the political system. It should also be noted that imposing a restrictive communications environment may not necessarily tamp down on political discussions as mean values of reported frequency do not correspond with rankings of media freedom. In fact, respondents from Beijing reported the highest frequency while Taipei has the lowest frequency for political discussions.

Perception of how representative the media is shows significant correlation with perception of political system for Hong Kong and Taipei. The difference in not showing significant correlation for Singapore and Beijing is not likely due to freer media being better at representing the people's voices as the mean values for perception of how well the media represent their opinions are similar across the four cities. This suggests that perception of the role of the media could be different between cities that enjoy a higher degree of media freedom and those that do not. Focus group interviews conducted by this study indicate that respondents from Beijing and Singapore frame mainstream media as merely sources of information while respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei do mention providing a voice for the people as one of the functions of mainstream media.

The model of input/output legitimacy appears to fit in the cities of Beijing, Singapore and Taipei as assessment of economy and assessment of freedom of speech are significantly correlated. As for Hong Kong, the transitory nature of its political system that incorporates elements from both authoritarian and democratic systems has led to a conflicted populace. Respondents who are least interested in politics and most authoritarian leaning have the most positive perception of the government. However, Hong Kong also has the highest demand for

freedom of expression. Having experienced years of freedom of expression and still being able to progress with stability, it is less likely that many people in Hong Kong would agree with the justification that media control is needed for political stability. The widespread student protests in 2014 on electoral reforms probably contributed to differences in how respondents ascertain legitimacy of their government as compared to respondents from other cities.

#### 7.4 Conclusion

It must be acknowledged that the survey data collection process is not ideal. However, there is no currently available data set that addresses the issues on hand and to conduct a representative survey would be beyond the financial capability of a PhD project. Comparing the responses from this project with the data from wave 3 of Asian Barometer that share some of the survey items does show similar patterns. Hence while the data may not allow us to make wider and representative conclusions, it does illuminate the issues at hand and provide a basis for future research.

Assessments and reports on media freedom are normally written by academics and media elites who may experience first-hand the impact of communication control, be it censorship, libel suits or loss of income/employment. However, for the ordinary citizen, such impact are more likely heard or read about than personally felt. Only when they feel that they personally need to restrict themselves in whatever situation do they bring it home or draw a connection to the government. Otherwise, such communication restrictions could be deemed as necessary or at the very least justified as beneficial for maintaining social harmony and stability in the country.

Given that respondents who view they have freedom of speech are more likely to view the political system favourably, the question some would be asking is whether it is possible to control individuals with opposing views while allowing the general public to feel

that they are personally unrestricted. In reviewing China's recent strategies in public opinion management (See King et al. 2013), some measures are clearly in alignment with this chapter's findings. For example, online postings were mostly left alone except for those that were widely shared. This calibrated approach could well point to the Chinese government understanding that restricting expression would hurt their legitimacy and thus they only restrict it to those few who are able to reach a wider audience while leaving the vast majority alone. The large domestic market also meant that the Chinese government can afford to block out international services while cultivating home-grown services that are willing to conduct such controls on behalf of the government. Coupled with the fact that most communication happen online now and technology is able to help dole out restrictions with subtleties and sophistication according to how influential each individual is, it is all the more likely that such controls would sustain without hurting their legitimacy too much since the average Chinese can go about their daily activities without feeling any overt restrictions.

Based on the literature, there was an intention at the start of this study to explain that a freer communication environment could lead to more political talk and consequently legitimizes the political system as communication about and with the government allows for justification of government policies and actions. However, the data has shown that it would be wishful to think that many more would be participating in discussions of policies with a freer communication environment. More freedom of expression does not mean that the average citizen is suddenly going to read more and discuss more about the government and policies, as demonstrated by Taipei's low reported frequency in political discussions. While the data indicates that actual or more frequent political talk is not the mechanism that contributes to better perception of the government, the data still suggests that not placing restrictions on expression in general would be beneficial to some extent.

Rather than seeking personal rights for expression, it would seem that many are concerned about creating a more conducive environment for everyone in general so that those who are more willing to participate can express themselves. At the end of the day, the free-rider mentality probably exists and most would not be paying more attention to government policies and actions other than in “not in my backyard” situations whereby their interests are directly affected. Similar to how Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) describe the demand for “stealth democracy” in USA whereby Americans want democracy but are not prepared to devote the personal effort in contribution and participation, it would be fair to suggest that citizens in this part of the world demand freedom of expression not particularly for their own expression but to allow for the possibility that other citizens could keep the government in check.

While there is an obvious demand for more freedom of expression in cities with stricter media control (see Figure 1.), the data from Table 2. showed that respondents from Beijing and Singapore would be willing to sacrifice the freedom for political stability. Hence, it would suggest that freedom of expression is important but given the right persuasive or sufficient justification, stability is much preferred. This study also conducted focus groups as part of the study and found that Singaporean respondents tend to compare their situation with China while Chinese respondents compare themselves with North Korea and then concluding that their own situation is not that intolerable. This shows that what matters is whether such communication policies can be justified and whether the people agree with the justification. That being said, the resources needed for calibrated communication control could be put to better use with the loosening of controls and involvement of citizens in governance processes.

NGOs championing for freer media should also take note that simply asking states to relinquish their control of the media is not going to be effective. A free media does not equate to a responsible and representative one that is beneficial to society. Resources should also be

allocated for professional training and building up of public service media that are responsible and ethical. Otherwise, free media that practices yellow journalism would only give freedom of expression a bad reputation and serve as justification for restrictive states.



## Chapter 8

### 8.1 The Paradox of Media Freedom

For many, it seems like a straightforward question, given a choice, people would prefer to have a media not limited by state control. However, when asked whether the media should have more freedom, less freedom or the same amount of freedom, Taipei surprisingly has a large percentage of respondents asking for lesser freedom in the media. Comparatively, Beijing and Hong Kong have about 5% asking for lesser or a lot lesser freedom for the media, Singapore has just 1% while Taipei has 28.4% asking for lesser or a lot lesser freedom.

The two cities (Hong Kong and Taipei) with freer environment have higher mean values when asked whether they think it is important for the media to be free to publish news without government control (4.06 for Hong Kong and 3.95 for Taipei). Comparatively, the mean value for Beijing is 3.31 and the mean value for Singapore is 3.19. When the question on media freedom is posed as a dichotomy between the media having the right to publish without government control and government having the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it thinks will be politically destabilising, the result is similar as Beijing and Singapore have mean values of 2.88 and 2.86 respectively while Hong Kong and Taipei score 2.07 and 2.35 respectively. (See Table 4.2 for details)

From these 2 questions, it is apparent that respondents in Hong Kong and Taipei place a higher importance on media freedom as compared to Beijing and Singapore. However, respondents from Taipei seek less media freedom as compared to the other cities. The cities that have lesser media freedom and did not place as high a value on media freedom however seek more media freedom. So how do we explain this conflict in belief?

The media freedom paradox also manifests itself in the difference between content producers and content consumers. Referring back to Table 4.1, on aggregate, for all four

cities, more survey respondents think that the government should have oversight over the media as compared to the government having the right to decide what the people can access on the internet. The difference in expectations could indicate that many are of the view that the mainstream media have a larger responsibility and have an effect on the people and thus the government should have oversight over it.

A key to understanding this paradox is not to view the puzzle in terms of absolute freedom. Rather, it is about the level of freedom for which the people can tolerate and agree with. The people have to be in agreement with the government that control is necessary. The perception that there is gradual change and progress is also important in having the people agree with the control. This would be shown in the focus group data. People think that compared to past, it is better. People also agree that some level of control is necessary.

How control is being framed is as important as how much or what is being controlled. Most respondents who agree that control is necessary think that there are others in society which needed the control. Those that needed to be regulated could be irresponsible media practitioners or ignorant public members who are easily influenced. The unifying theme is that the respondents have framed themselves as being capable of responsible and independent thoughts while others might require additional guidance. This conforms to the third-person effect hypothesis in media studies. While this research did not set out to investigate on third-person effect, many of the respondents gave responses and explanations that adhere to the third-person effect hypothesis.

Going along this line of thought, this chapter would examine the responses through how they position self, government and media in the issue of media control. This chapter will first elaborate on the focus group design and process. Following that it would be a general

description of the findings for each city and finally a thematic analysis. The conclusion would then examine the overall acceptance of communications control across the four cities.

## 8.2 Focus Group Method

The focus groups sessions were conducted in the 6 months' period between November 2014 and May 2015. Given that the topic would be politically sensitive in some cities, the focus groups were intentionally kept small to an average of four participants in each session. This thus reduce fears of speaking in front of a large group. See Table 4.

The sessions were conducted in the spoken language for which respondents were most comfortable with. Hence Mandarin was used for participants in Beijing and Taipei, Cantonese for participants in Hong Kong and English for participants in Singapore. In Beijing and Hong Kong, there were student assistants from the same university that the respondents were from to help with the conduct of the sessions. For Hong Kong, the need for student assistants was mainly due to language as the author is not proficient in Cantonese. For Beijing, the use of student assistants was to put the participants at ease. The topic discussed was considered sensitive and there would be reservations in expressing their opinions if the only person asking questions were a foreigner. The perceived social environment would be less formal and friendlier with someone of similar age group asking most of the questions.

All sessions were audio recorded for analysis. Participants were briefed before each session and consent was sought for the recording. Participants were also assured that they could opt to stop or withdraw from the focus group at any point during or after the session should they feel uncomfortable with the questions. Each session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes depending on how much the participants respond to the questions.

The aim of the focus group sessions is to elicit viewpoints on what the respondents think are the roles of the media and what they think about media control. Respondents were asked directly what they think *should be* the role of the media and what the role the media *is*

*playing* now. Leading on from roles of the media, they were asked whether the media play any role in helping them assess the performance of the government. They were also asked how controlled do they think their media are and whether there should be changes to the situation. It was also anticipated that it might not be easy for some to discuss the issues conceptually or in abstract terms since for many, the media is simply resources for entertainment and information. Notions of media freedom and representation in media are not what people are concerned with if the political culture has no such emphasis. Thus the focus groups were designed to include some thorny scenarios to assist participants in thinking about how the media would/should function in those scenarios.

The first scenario explores the “not in my backyard syndrome” that any society would face. It is intended to help respondents think about representation in media and voicing concerns to the government. Respondents were presented with the scenario that the government has announced that it plans to build a nuclear power plant just outside the city which they reside in. The scenario was chosen as it has obvious risks and benefits that the society needs. It is also sufficiently general enough as any society has demands for energy and carbon-based energy is commonly known to be finite. The risks for nuclear power plants are also well known as Japan’s Fukushima nuclear accident happened in 2011 and was widely reported globally. For the scenario they were asked whether they would agree or oppose to such a plan and what they would do if they oppose. Then follow up questions included what role do they think the media would play in such a situation, whether the government would consider the public’s opinions and whether they would be willing to express their views to journalists should they be approached on the street. Respondents were also asked whether it would make any difference whether they were interviewed by local or foreign media.

The second scenario asked the respondents to describe how they would seek more information should they hear about a rumour of a local hospital being quarantined and possibility of patients dying from flu-like symptoms. The scenario examines views on censorship and information control. This scenario also examines the perception of transparency of government communication in times of public crisis. Many parts of Asia had been through this type of public crisis with SARS in 2003 and H1N1 pandemic in 2009. Most, if not all, respondents would have had some experience with such a serious public health crisis. Respondents were also asked whether they think the government would cover up such an incident and whether the media would be influenced by the government in how they report the incident.

The third scenario examines whether respondents view the media as a form of supervision of the government. Respondents were asked if they would expose government officials to the media should they come across evidence of corruption. Whistleblowing of government corruption is the clearest and most direct example of acting as a check on government. Follow up questions include whether they would instead post such evidence online, share on social media or simply report to the relevant government authority. The three scenarios thus cover the common functions/roles that a free media environment that would in theory contribute towards the legitimising of a government.

The transcripts were coded and analysed were guided by the strategies as described in Corbin and Strauss (2008). Responses that relate to concepts of media and expression were coded and then categorised into themes related to process legitimacy.

All cities had three sessions except for Beijing with 4 sessions. Beijing had an additional session as the participants in the first session was relatively quiet and reserved. Hence the decision was made to arrange for an additional session. For each city, there would

be one session for students from sciences/engineering faculties, one session for students from arts/humanities/social sciences faculties and a session for students from a mix of both. This is to ensure that this study draws the opinions from students of different academic backgrounds. It was also intended to have an even mix of male and female participants in each city and in general it was quite balance except for Hong Kong.

#### 8.2.2 Limitations of the focus group method

In some of the sessions, there were some signs of hesitation for some questions, so some respondents might be withholding their true or deeper sentiments. While respondent might have been briefed and assured before the start of the session that their identity would be protected, the questions asked during the session could still be unsettling for some.

The average person does not use language or choose words with precision. It is not always possible to clarify on the spot during the conduct of the focus group sessions as to clarify every ambiguous statement would hinder the flow of the conversation. Sometimes it could also be that only in the transcribing and coding process that one realises a statement could be ambiguous. Hence while as far as possible this research would code to the most relevant meaning/reference that the respondents may make, there is still some substantial amount of subjectivity in the coding and analysis. This is an inherent weakness in the focus group method.

The ingrained patriotism in China makes it hard for the respondents to criticise the government. The rhetoric in China is that the party equals the government which equals the country. To many, criticising the party is akin to criticising the country and being critical of the country is unpatriotic. Culturally, there is also the tendency to “Hu Duan”, which means to shield shortcomings and forbid others from criticising one’s kinship. Hence, to be critical of the government or country to foreigners would not be something many would do. As one

Chinese respondent puts it, *“Domestically, I may be saying whatever I have to say, if it is for foreign media, I definitely would still protect the image of China.”*

At various points during the focus group sessions, when it appears that the questions would elicit responses that reflect China negatively, some respondents would intentionally add in justifications on why certain policies or point out that other countries face the same issue too. For example, a Beijing respondent points out *“Maybe there are some things becomes too messy once you insist on it being a particular way. I feel that this question is not a China's problem”*. Respondents from other cities however do not show any signs that they held back in criticising their government.

### 8.3 Findings and Analysis

Analysis is focused on the content of speech and not on the non-verbal speech elements. Hence, non-verbal speech elements such as hesitation, changes in tone, volume, speed are not analysed. Although it is acknowledged these speech elements would contain vast amount of information, they are not analysed as in many instances it would require subjective interpretation. However obvious sarcasm and jokes which a respondent may say and other respondents reacted to are noted and analysed accordingly rather taking the literal meaning of the words uttered.

#### General Observations and Perception of the Government

In every session, respondents would portray themselves as media literate and savvy. No one indicated that they or the people around them needed the government to tell them what news to read or what media to consume. Interest and awareness in socio-political issues and information is quite varied amongst the respondents. Across all four cities, there are respondents who expressed apathy towards politics and would not want to have anything to do with it if the issues do not concern them. This is especially apparent for respondents from

China and Singapore. It may seem like the respondents are only concerned about their immediate surroundings and self-interests, which as described by Lerner (1958) is being “backward”. Lerner’s view is one of many views on modernization and many theories of modernization focus on socio-economic development which theorised that as societies get richer, there would be a change in people’s values to become more concerned with the wider society. However, the lack of empowerment and civic engagement in these societies could be a better explanation.

All the respondents are all born after 1990 and the youths in all these 4 cities would have experienced life that is relatively well-provided for. What is different would be the political climate for which they are brought up in. The political liberalisation in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1980’s and 1990’s had been aided by top down liberalizations to some extent. The colonial government of Hong Kong and Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan had taken steps to liberalized the political landscapes. On the other hand, the governments in China and Singapore clamped down on bottom up growth of civil society in the 1980’s.

The behaviour of the respondents thus could be a reflection of what they could possibly do in the kind of political context that they are in. When caring for matters that only indirectly concern them carries the possibility of severe repercussions, it is not unexpected that lesser people are willing to stick their heads out. Some may argue that these community sentiments are learned as those in more liberal societies are exposed to more of such actions and activities, however, the growth of such activities could also be due to the lesser costs involved in the more liberal societies. Perception on the socio-politico climate in the cities would thus affect the behaviour of the people.



## China

Respondents from Beijing generally think that they do not have any influence on the government. However, it has to be noted that while most people do not think that they have any influence over the government, it does not mean that the CCP can govern without care of the people's opinions. The absence of a revolving door politics also mean that those in power have to be mindful of longer term politics. The loss in support of the party would equate to the collapse of the system. It is not like there is any other political party ready to take over the governing of the country once the people lose confidence in the ruling party.

When voters in USA vote in a non-traditional politician to lead the country or the UK vote to leave the EU, many narratives in the media were that the people are tired of the politics as usual and want to throw in a spanner to disrupt the system. For them it is different as institutions exists with sufficient stability and independence from political parties to keep the countries functioning. This not the same for China as the CCP is embedded in every institution that makes decision in the country. Both the government and the governed are well aware that the CCP losing support and legitimacy is not going to be simply a change to another party but would likely be a system collapse. Both know the consequences would be disastrous and would rather take the path of gradual change within the CCP, even if change is going to be at glacial pace. What matters is not the human rights or the freedom of speech that the Western media constantly report about. Those matters do not feature in their daily life. For the average person in China, it is about finding ways to achieve what they need and want, without making any turbulence in society. This is the same for Singapore as many of those who expressed aversion towards PAP's controls would also lament that there is no viable alternative in opposition that could take over the reins.

Generally, Beijing respondents based their assessment of the government on what they can personally see and experience or what their family relate to them. In other words,

“lived experience” forms their opinions. However, there were more than a few confused looks when queried how they assess the performance of the government. This reflects that culturally, the people do not think about judging the performance of the government. After all, there is not much anyone can do even if one is not satisfied with the performance of the government. There may be small scale elections for some villages and small towns but at the urban city level, there is no election mechanisms to change out the people in government and poor performance is not breaking the law. One Beijing respondent however did mention about a teacher in high school making her class examine the targets that the local government posted at the beginning of the year and then compare what was actually achieved by the end of the year.

While the respondents may think that they cannot influence the government, they would frequently come to the conclusion that the government would not let negative outcomes happen. According to them, problems happen because local governments do not follow instructions from the central government or there are simply too many low quality (see “suzhi” below) people breaking the rules. For them, even when unpopular measures are carried out, there would always be reasons for the collective good for which those measures are carried out. This shows that while China is ruled by an authoritarian government, the CCP is still mindful of public opinions. Much of what it does still aligns with what the masses want. Perry (2015) also argues that the CCP is a populist government and much of what it does reflects the people’s demand for economic progress and national pride.

Populism as a concept does not have a definition that is widely accepted. However, in general, it has been commonly used as a negative label for manifestos and policies that appeal to certain large groups of citizens while in most situations would not be beneficial to the whole country. Classic examples would be tax cuts that could result in budget deficits or expenditure on infrastructures that do not have sufficient demand. Other common policies

include race biased welfare policies that favour a certain portion of the population or subsidies for inefficient industries that have oversized voting power. In essence, populism is not based on any particular ideology but conforms according to whatever policies that could garner support. From this perspective, the CCP can arguably be seen as a populist government.

Respondents from Beijing frequently bring up the term “suzhi” (“素质”) when explaining why they think China needs to control its media. “Suzhi” can be loosely translated as “quality” or “human quality”. It is not quality in a biological or eugenics sense but quality seen in terms of a person’s behaviour. It is about whether one is civilised and cultured, or not. In general, many Chinese use the term to justify for more control over the people as the “suzhi” of many in China has not reached a level for which their behaviours are good for China. (See elaboration on “suzhi” in Kipnis 2006)

As explained by a Beijing respondent, *“Currently, China's society is not perfect, the quality of the people has not reached a certain level, so to put it in not a nice way, the quality of a large proportion of Chinese people is still low, that is, those with higher education is still in the minority, so there are few people who could handle those information, **only a small part of the population has the ability to make rational judgements.** Most people still appear to just follow suit, or would show extreme reactions. So current work on the control of public opinion is still necessary, after all, now the situation in China is not particularly optimistic.”*

The thinking that many in China lack “suzhi” means that many thinks that the internet is a wild west that needs to be controlled. Given free reins, the vast majority of internet users in China might result in social instability. As one respondent said, *“And then if the so-called public opinion is too much or what, I think the internet would be up in arms, because Chinese*

*internet users are very easily incited, and then I feel that it is easy for them to get angry over anything.”*

Another reason that is frequently brought up by Chinese respondents is “guoqing” (国情). This refers to the “national conditions” that the country faces. It is an imprecise and catchall term for any condition that could explain why the government did what they did. It could refer to economic conditions, human development factors, political system etc. Basically, this is an echo of the government stance as the term has been used in much of the CCP’s propaganda when arguing for not liberalising the country. Many Chinese has thus internalised the term and use it to justify and defend the government’s policies. When unknowns or whatever possible scenarios are juxtaposed with the existing difficulties that the country faces, it would appear to most Chinese that status quo may not be that bad. After all, why rock the boat or try to do something different that could possibly make the situation worse of. A few respondents did wistfully indicated that they hope for more freedom/liberalization in China but will nonetheless come back to the point on “guoqing” and then conclude that it is not possible for the moment.

A related “guoqing” factor is that there are simply too many people. Chinese respondents would frequently fall back on this reason when explaining why control is needed. For them, there are too many people for the media to represent everyone’s views. One respondent lamented about not being able to vote for a representative in government but almost immediately would say that the sheer number of Chinese people would make logistics for voting impossible. There are simply too many people for elections to take place. They have to be part of a unity. Individual and private views are looked upon as self-interested while public opinions are simply subsumed under national interests.

Finally, it must be pointed out that China is a high-context society and in the discussion of politics, much are left unsaid but merely implied. First proposed by Edward Hall in 1976 (See Kim, Pan & Park 1998), the high-low context culture concept refers to differences in the amount of information conveyed in communication practices for different cultures. A low context culture depends less on contextual cues and require people to convey more information during communication while a high context culture convey lesser information and expects the other party to know the background information required to make sense of what is communicated. The concept does not put different cultures in a continuum but depends on a set of factors and could be applied to different foci across nations. China is a high-context culture for which the subject matter of politics is very high in context. One is expected to know the background and reasons for key events or be brushed off using the commonly used phrase “ni dong de” (translated as “you should know it” or “you should understand it”). A significant amount of what was discussed in the focus groups thus are deemed as ambiguous and open to interpretation.

### Hong Kong

The political landscape in Hong Kong is struggling through a transition now as the younger generation attempts make sense of their identity in the one country two systems arrangement. Many in the younger generation received education that included citizenship education that highlighted importance of civil society and participation.

However, a large swath of the Hong Kong population is still averse towards politics and would avoid political activities. Some respondents indicated that their family are not supportive of their participation in protests or other activities as they are politically. It is not only due to parental pressure as many respondents also indicated that they are themselves cautious about getting into discussions on politics lest conflicts occur due to differences in

viewpoints. So many would rather avoid talking about politics unless they know the interlocutor well.

Respondents still have a high level of confidence with the Hong Kong civil service but that appears to be eroding according to some respondents. Many acknowledge that the Hong Kong government is constrained by the mainland government. So even if the Hong Kong people expressed their views and opinions, the Hong Kong government may not be able to carry it out due to the pressure from mainland. Overall, their anger and dissatisfaction is generally directed towards the mainland government.

### Singapore

Many respondents from Singapore expressed lack of interest in politics and government policies. For many of them, political issues do not concern them. The political landscape in Singapore is probably the most predictable and staid in the world. A respondent from Singapore explains why apathy or ambivalence develops, *“I thought ambivalence includes more like, more like don’t care rather than you fear. Cos like, if you are going, ultimately since there’s a consequence right, so if there’s going to be a consequence then I as well like don’t care what. Right? But then if there’s no consequence then maybe people will start formulating, like thinking about it more, cos there’s no consequence and I can voice my opinions, so I will think about the matter more. If I know there’s a consequence then, might as well I just don’t go there.”*

Most think that the government would simply do what it thinks is right regardless of what the public think. Most think that public consultations are merely going through the motion as the government would always just do what they had planned or announced. Many cited the building of the casinos in the last decade as an example of the government’s lack of concern of public opinion.

However, after more than 50 years of single party rule, many Singaporeans may have already accepted the system that has been shaped by the PAP to be unable to produce a government formed by other political parties. The extended period of rule that has brought about consistent economic growth has also convinced many of the capability of the government, with one respondent simply saying “*They know what is best for us.*” Many of them would also compare the level of development in Singapore with other neighbouring countries, especially Malaysia, in order to justify their unquestioning trust of the government.

Respondents from Singapore would also frequently mention the rapid change in education and literacy over the years. The mean years of schooling for Singaporeans above 25 years old was 4.7 years in 1980 and 10.7 years in 2016. The change within one to two generations for which the average education received was merely primary school level to the current tertiary level is immense. This means that many respondents have parents and grandparents who have had very few years of education, if any. Many respondents thus emphasized that their generation is different from their parents’ generation and even more different than their grandparents’ generation. The large gap in educational level could then cause many young people to think that many in the older generation lack the literacy and skills to be critical of information. This attitude is especially heightened given the frequent discussions on how the younger generations, as “digital natives”, are different from the older generations who are “digital migrants”. This view of large difference in literacy informs how they talk about media control amongst different generations in Singapore.

## Taipei

Taipei’s liberal political and media landscape allowed the people much space to express themselves. All the respondents were open about their thoughts and would even express embarrassment about the chaotic nature of their politics and media. Except for a few

who indicated lack of interest, most demonstrated that they are politically aware and informed. Many also indicated that the younger generation are not like the older generation who are more party biased. Most of them indicated that they base their support on the candidate and the platform for which they campaign on.

Criticism about the government seems to be accepted and respondents do not have the tendency to defend the government or government actions. People may indicate distrust of the government but that does not mean they do not want the government involved in their lives. Many would still want the government to do many things as they know that provision of public goods would require a central authority. Pew Research Center (2015) too found that Americans may indicate distrust in their government but would still want government intervention in many aspects of their life.

#### Perception of the Media

China has the most restrictive communications out of the four cites and it is definitely not that the Chinese are unaware of the controls. As one respondent said, "*CCTV News definitely would not (trust), because everyone says that if you feel that your life is blissful, then you are living inside CCTV News.*" Some respondent would also mention that the CCP control the media through framing of issues and usage of more positive language. However, not trusting it does not mean that they avoid these sources totally. The reality on the ground is that most people know that they have to take the information disseminated with a large pinch of salt. Most people are not watching and reading the news as it is. Many people are reading and watching the news in an attempt to decipher what are the leaders in CCP want or plan to do. Other than that, they would still watch CCTV as it has become a family routine for which their family would spend time with.

Beijing respondents are clear about the government's position on the role of the media in China. A respondent puts in across bluntly, "*The role they actually play, then actually, media you also know, they are the throat and tongue of the party, the role they play is to let you know what the party wants you to know, they tell you, that's it.*" The respondents also demonstrated that they are aware of



the extent of the controls as when asked what media outlet is official government media (and therefore controlled by the government), a respondent replied that “*actually everything that you see, basically are all official*”. While it is not wrong to all media are controlled by the government, there is a need to clarify the type and level of control. Allowing the government to remove content is not the same as reproducing everything the CCP propaganda department churns out. There are official media outlets such as CCTV and People’s Daily that function solely as the voice of CCP and are completely funded by the government. Many other media outlets (while still having to be supervised by provincial authorities) function as market driven media outlets that depend on advertising and readership to sustain themselves. Hence while the media landscape is firmly within the control of the government, there is still differentiation of content and some media outlets do try to push the boundaries in a bid to fight for eyeballs. Some For example, Southern Weekly (some translate as Southern Weekend), a publication based in Guangzhou, China has a reputation of having a more liberal stance and had numerous run-ins with the government for publishing controversial topics.

Many respondents also gave the example of Phoenix TV as an outlet that has a more objective voice. Phoenix TV is a media company based in Hong Kong and is permitted to broadcast in mainland China. The company is partly owned by CCTV, which according to the company’s CEO is to signal that the company would not go against the CCP (Pan 2005). While not entirely independent, Phoenix’s news channel has a better reputation of being more objective and truthful than other state media in China.

The lack of trust for almost every media meant that many respondents from Beijing end up saying that they rely on their social circle and many respondents mentioned “friends around me” when asked about where they would get information. Relying on social circle for information obviously have severe limitations since most people would not have the social connections that afford access to timely information. This would mean that many would be relying on hearsays and rumours. However, saying that you trust your family and friends for information would not appear as gullible as saying one depend on mainstream media for information when everyone knows that mainstream media is controlled by the government.

This lack of trust in almost every media shows that the CCP does not have to convince the Chinese people that state run media are always right. They merely need to seed doubts in the Chinese people towards other information sources. This simple strategy of muddying the entire information environment is sufficient for them to be able to do relatively well in shepherding public opinions in China in this internet age. No one in China believes everything that the government or state-run media proclaim. But when many people in China doubt the intentions and objectivity of foreign media, it creates a deficiency of information sources for which the Chinese people could turn to. Now all that the CCP needs to do is to convince the Chinese people that even when Chinese state media lie or hide something from the public, Chinese state media did it for the common good.

However, a controlled media that is not prompt in informing or would not inform the people creates an environment that is susceptible to the spread of disinformation since they know that the possibility of the government blocking the media is high. Although the respondents indicated the need to be wary of gossips or baseless information, the lack of credible information in the mainstream media would still drive many towards their social circle. There are indications that there are efforts to educate the people about being wary of fake information/fake news but the lack of credible and reliable sources does not help the people navigate through the communication landscape. Rather it seems that it is more about cultivating a general sense of scepticism so that when state apparatus is not trusted then no other source is trusted as well. The level of scepticism towards all forms of media would work to CCP's advantage since even reputable international news agencies would be doubted by the Chinese people. Hence even news stories from international news agencies that exposed the wealth of Chinese leaders would be looked upon with some scepticism.

Responses on whether there is any difference in speaking to local or foreign media reveals the differences in how respondents view the role of the media. Even when respondents from Beijing know that their local media would censor content, they indicated a preference in talking to local media rather than foreign media. According to them, it is safer to talk to local media as they would edit out anything that is not appropriate. Hence having their voice heard is not important. What is important is

not getting into trouble or portraying the country in a negative light. Truth is not as important so long as the country is stable.

The differences in values could also be a factor in the poor perception of foreign media. Civil rights violations tend to be higher on the agenda of western media even if it is just affecting one or two persons. However, for many Chinese, they would not think of it as too much of a problem if the scale is minimal. *“I think foreigners' views toward some of the things in China. This is a problem, but they will see this problem as something very major. In fact, in our view it is actually a small problem, but I do not know through what ways, they will portray this matter very seriously. Because I went to this class, foreign teachers for English classes, sometimes they will talk to us regarding some of these matters, I will sometimes feel that they are too exaggerated, there is no big deal, but I do not know where they got this information.”* Some of these impressions could also be due to the rebuff towards highlighting of shortcomings in China. For many Chinese, they subscribe to the Chinese proverb of “the family’s shame should not be known to the public”

Ironically, even as international media report on the oppressive nature of China’s government, many Chinese tend to think that they have it better than people in many other countries, especially compared to the minorities in USA. For most media outlets around the world, “plane landed safely” is not news but “plane crashed into the river” is. So news from around the world tend to lean towards the negative aspects of life. As with people from around the world, the types of news that the Chinese people comes into contact with for news regarding other countries tend to highlight the violence and other negative issues. Those negative reports and images then contribute to how Chinese perceive how people in other countries live. At the same time, comparisons on crime rates and personal safety, for which China performs relatively better than most countries, would result in a somewhat positive assessment of the Chinese government in its ability to protect the people.

Being exposed to all the negative news coverage of other countries while assessing their own country based on their own life experiences would thus result in a biased and micro view. Given that the average Chinese person is not going to be an activist and locked up like Liu Xiaobo, they would naturally think that, on the whole, life in China is quite good.

For Singapore, it would appear that the balancing act of control and credibility by the government has served the government well as many respondents still express (qualified) trust of the media. The awareness of the government's control juxtaposed with the efforts of the government's efforts to maintain credibility of the mainstream media results in a nuanced trust of the media. Many indicated that other than political topics, they generally trust the mainstream media. A respondent sums it as *"I would trust the facts but probably not their opinions"*. This is a common response from Singapore. Many think that the mainstream media would not be too harsh on the government. Another respondent expressed such scepticism of the media, *"maybe if you say something controversial to the Straits Times, they will like water it down and then put it in the news."*

Respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei all expressed that they do not expect any media to be balanced in their reporting. For them, they think that polarisation of the media is normal and represents the interests of the media owner. At the same time, the polarisation also help the consumers identify the type of publication they want. Most respondents are thus able to point out which are the blue-leaning or green-leaning publications in Taipei while respondents from Hong Kong can point out which publications are friendly towards China's policies.

Many in Taipei and Hong Kong do not trust the media too but the lack of trust is due to different media outlets acting irresponsibly. Many of think that the media practitioners do not behave professionally and are prone to sensationalism or adopt paparazzi attitude. It is not a systematic control of information as what is done in China. Hence, while being sceptical of some media outlets, the reality that there is competition between media outlets and there is competing information enable the respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei to conclude that government cannot hide information. Chinese respondents on the other hand conclude that the government can hide information as they know that the media has to follow the government's orders.

#### Internet

In all four cities, there are respondents who cite Yahoo! News as an information source that offers independent or alternative information. (Note that Yahoo! had shut down its web portal for

China since 2013) Yahoo! News is predominantly a news aggregator that serves repackaged news stories from local and international news outlets. Yahoo! does localise content for different markets and create some original content through its local hires. However, the bulk of its content is still syndicated. Yet, the act of curating content from multiple sources with just a dash of original local content has given Yahoo! the image of being independent.

While people in China are practically surfing the internet as if it is a China intranet, it is not as if the Chinese people are living in their own world. The Chinese are aware of the major popular services in the rest of the world such as Google, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, etc. It is just that many have come to terms with the blockage of overseas services while local alternatives serve their needs as just well, if not better, with the localisation features. The pain is usually for newer services that do not yet have local alternatives. A few complained about the sudden blockage of Instagram after garnering quite a number of followers. Some may attempt to “flip over” the firewall with VPN but the constant additional effort and the inconsistency for VPN services meant that many would eventually give up using those blocked services.

Many scholars have extolled on the advantages and potential of the internet as a borderless supercharged public sphere that would allow people to come together and voice their opinions. As a respondent from Singapore described how anonymity online afforded her space to express herself, *“It’s like easier to talk about it on like, if you think that you are doing it anonymously, on tumblr, like to a person who doesn’t really know you in real life.”* It should be noted that other than this one respondent from Singapore who mentioned about the anonymity that Tumblr affords her allows her to talk more freely, no one else mentioned about how the internet allows them to express what they might not express offline.

It is also precisely of the internet’s public nature and precisely of its ability to tear down walls that cause some to be more cautious about expressing their opinions. The adage of “on the internet, nobody knows you are a dog” is no longer relevant. Anonymity is no longer a given. Morozov (2011) already warned that technology can work against the people too and governments have more resources to ensure that technology works for the government. This message is one that the Singapore

government wants to deliver to the people. While the government is fully aware that it is impossible to filter or block speech online, it is more than willing to demonstrate that as long as the government knows your IP address, your identity would be known. Another respondent from Singapore recounted how the news reports of those who got into trouble for online speech made her more cautious, *“I didn’t feel it as acutely like that I would be held liable for the things that I say, as aware as I am now. I was wondering how would they track one person down. Now I know better. So I wouldn’t do it again.”* The conclusion is that there were and will have people who would be punished for careless speech. Just the prosecution of a few and the mainstream media having a field day over these instances would remind the masses that no one can hide behind the screen on the internet.

In terms of information from the internet, most respondents from Taipei indicate a high level of trust in online forums such as PTT. Even when questioned directly whether they fear the information might be fake, many would say that because of the open nature, those who post fake information would be rebutted. The posts with evidence (pictorial or convincing narratives) would then be pushed to top by everyone. While many respondents from Taipei appear to have a high level of trust in PTT forums, respondents from other cities are more wary about astroturfing. For respondents from Beijing, a few mentioned internet “water army” and “Wu Mao Dang” as possible nefarious causes for which they are wary of. Internet “water army” (See Chen et al. 2013) typically refers to commercial astroturfing for which commercial entities would pay people to post reviews, comments and other user generated content that would be beneficial to their business. “Wu mao dang” (loosely translated as “50-cent party”) refers to people hired by the CCP’s propaganda department to post content that are aligned with the CCP’s agenda. Researchers estimated between a quarter million (Mou, Atkin & Fu 2011) to two million (King, Pan & Roberts 2017) of these hired commenters are actively posting online.

Hong Kong expressed similar fears about “wu mao dang”, indicating that they are afraid of the influence from CCP rather than what the Hong Kong government might do. In Singapore, these astroturfers are known as the internet brigade. This practice of having commentators who post

anonymously to defend the policies of the government was started in 2007 when the PAP realised that most online comments had a negative attitude towards the PAP (Li, 2007).

### Perception on Media Control

For all the media reports about Great Firewall of China and lack of freedom of speech, the reality is that many do not feel that it is all that overwhelming. A Beijing respondent said, *“from my personal experience, I feel no effect”*. It suggests that some have already gotten used to the controls and learnt to live with it. However, this sentiment is not shared by all and some do feel the negative impact from the controls. As a Beijing respondent puts it, *“It is because the news is a very important channel for the access to information for the public, if the news is not highly reliable then would feel that, we live in a very opaque environment.”*

There is also a tendency for Chinese respondents to compare their situation with North Korea, pointing out that they are not kept in the dark like the North Koreans are. While this may appear to be trivial or superficial, it also means that the Chinese people would not tolerate a reversal into totalitarianism. A comparison with North Korea would bring South Korea to mind. The separation of the Korea peninsular onto two different paths would serve as a reminder for the Chinese people what might have happened to the Chinese themselves had China remained closed off to the world.

Being used to the controls does not mean that they are not upset when they experience the controls. Negative sentiments usually surface when respondents could not explain why certain services such as Instagram or content such as subtitled US dramas are banned. To many of them, these are just harmless entertainment that would not jeopardise the security or stability of the country. A respondent ranted, *“This form of control, it is not something the government should do, like, uh, the media, you want control, you can, you just go and control the People's Daily, Xinhua news agency or what. For others, you should stop this unified management. If the people wants to listen to you, naturally they will buy your daily newspaper.”* While many have internalised and justified the controls, a few respondents from Beijing do challenge the justifications and think that the controls in

communications is not beneficial and describe the impact as “confining thoughts” and “limiting the development of people”.

The Singapore government is not shy about its media control policies and would openly justify its actions. In an interview with BBC in 2013, Singapore’s Minister for communications and information, Yaacob Ibrahim, justified that the changes in regulations for online news sites were to “protect the interests of the ordinary Singaporean” and ensure that Singaporeans “read the right thing” (See BBC 2013c). In the face of criticisms about its lack of media freedom, Singapore’s leaders constantly tout that the internet infrastructure in Singapore is not subjected to any form of government control. Other than the symbolic hundred banned sites to demonstrate the government’s stance on what is not tolerated, the internet access in Singapore is practically unrestricted. This diverts attention away from the government’s strategy which is to instil a fear in expressing rather than denial of access. The ability to access the internet freely does not mean risk-free as Singapore operates a minefield control rather than a great wall control. There are areas for which the ambiguous application of laws would likely deter some people from expressing themselves online. An example would be the charging of Amos Yee for obscenity for a caricature that most people would find it as merely crude or tasteless.

The effectiveness of mines and minefields is not about being able to fill up an entire field with mines. Rather, it is the ability to send the signal that there are mines that are lethal enough and there is no information on where the exact positions of mines are. The feeling of unknown mines is as powerful as having the entire field filled up with mines as only the most courageous or the most stupid would dare to venture into the minefield.

Nobody wants to be the next Roy Ngerng or Amos Yee. When discussing about expressing opinions in public, respondents from Singapore frequently mention these examples that are widely reported in the mainstream media. Amos Yee is a teenage blogger who is known to produce and upload social commentary videos on Youtube. Most of Yee’s videos featured himself talking about socio-political issues in an opinionated and animated manner. Following the death of Lee Kuan Yew



in 2015, Yee uploaded a video titled “Lee Kuan Yew is Finally Dead” in which Yee likened Lee Kuan Yew to Jesus and opined that both are power hungry and malicious. Subsequently, Yee also drew a caricature of Lee Kuan Yew engaging in anal sex with former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher, justifying that he was normalizing the acts of criticising and making fun of political leaders. For the two actions, he was charged and convicted for religious hate speech and obscenity. Yee was sentenced to four weeks’ jail for the conviction. The following year, Yee was again convicted for religious hate speech, this time for a video about Islam. Yee subsequently flew to the USA and sought political asylum there.

Roy Ngerng is an activist who blogs about the socio-political issues. In May 2014, Ngerng wrote a blog post titled “Where Your CPF Money is Going: Learning From the City Harvest Trial”. In the post, Ngerng described the relationships between the Lee Hsien Loong and the various government organisations that impact on the national retirement fund (known as Central Provident Fund, CPF) and how the relationships appear similar to the City Harvest criminal breach of trust case that was ongoing then. The City Harvest case involved church leaders misusing church funds to support the pop song career of the church founder’s wife. By drawing the link, Ngerng was thus sued for defamation by Lee Hsien Loong as it alluded that Lee was misappropriating monies Singaporeans paid into the national retirement fund. Ngerng lost the lawsuit and was ordered to pay damages of SGD\$150,000 in December 2015. Unlike previous defamation cases, Ngerng was able to negotiate an instalment plan for the damages and avoided being bankrupted. Since August 2016, Ngerng has not posted anything on his blog. Following a string of politicians who had been sued and bankrupted for defaming Singapore’s political leaders, Amos Yee and Roy Ngerng are the current exemplars for people who got into trouble for talking too carelessly.

The impact of these high-profile cases on the public psyche and how these cases create a chilling effect is reflected in how one respondent from Singapore describes how widespread self-censorship is in Singapore: *“I feel like there’s a lot of self-censorship in Singapore. So like, even if I think that that is true, unless I have hard evidence, I wouldn’t dare to bring this out, cos it might get me into trouble.”*

While some respondents may say that they know where the “line” for which they should not cross, it would be more accurate to say they know where the minefields are. Most people in Singapore just agree vaguely that the topics of religion, race and the Lee family are off-limits. The incorrect impression that some respondents from Singapore think that Amos Yee got into trouble due to libel showed that many simply do not think critically about what was wrong about what was said. In addition, going by the respondents’ hesitance in expressing their views in public or to journalists, it shows that they need to have utmost confidence that they are not near any minefield before voicing out their opinions.

There is also the delineation of public and private spheres for which one may be able to opine in a freer manner privately. In short, some are pointing out (gladly) that the Singapore government do not or has not reached the surveillance level that is similar to George Orwell's 1984. This emphasis on delineation of public and private sphere was also observed in respondents from Beijing. Respondents from both Beijing and Singapore would point out that they would be comfortable talking about political topics privately but not in public.

There appears to be a very simplistic understanding of freedom of speech for some Singaporeans. To them, it seems that freedom of speech is merely the ability to say something. There is a lack of acknowledgement that the ability to say things without fear or repercussions is the key. This is part of the internalisation that is inculcated by political leaders. There are many occasions when political leaders are questioned about the freedom of speech situation in Singapore and those who asked the question would be deflected with the question about whether they are being stopped from asking the question or stopped from saying anything. So for them, since they do not personally feel any of the repercussions, they do not think critically about the issue. As one respondent puts it, *“But it doesn’t affect my life. So I don’t really find anything wrong with it.”*

The internalisation is then further solidified with the constant emphasis that only “sensitive” topics have to be avoided and they think that they are well aware of where the out of bounds markers are to avoid getting into trouble. No respondent from Singapore questions the wisdom of avoiding

"sensitive" topics and whether avoidance is really effective or the only approach towards cordial relations between different ethnic and religious communities.

The extensive controls in Singapore, while more nuanced than China's, have also caused the public to be sceptical of the mainstream media to some extent. As one respondent from Singapore puts it, *"I think there should be like less control because right now, I mean currently what they are doing, like people still have this scepticism that it is too controlled and like whatever that the media reporting, it is like, you know, just trying to paint the government in a good light. So I think this scepticism is very unhealthy, like we tend to not really believe news sources."*

Respondents from Hong Kong are less concerned about direct controls from the government, be it Hong Kong's government or China's government. There is an air of optimism that press freedom has been entrenched in the Hong Kong society and thus the people would not tolerate government censorship. Coupled with the pervasive use of internet, most think that it would not be likely that the government can block any information. However, as the bulk of Hong Kong's media industry is privately owned rather than government controlled, most respondents think that commercial interests are the main source of influence. Even without direct government control, some media companies would still toe the line as China's government could influence advertising revenues and restrict their operations within mainland China.

Many respondents thus expressed disappointment with the changes they observed with TVB. TVB is the most established free to air TV station in Hong Kong and it is regarded as a key source for which the Hong Kong people shape their cultural and collective identity. However, following the 1997 handover, many think that the management of TVB is bowing to the pressures of the Mainland government and the news content on TVB are now sympathetic towards mainland China positions. Many now refer TVB as CCTVB, referencing to the China's government media CCTV.

However, even when they expressed lack of trust in most media outlets, there is more overt disdain for those outlets that are particularly friendly with China's positions. As one respondent explains his position when dealing with media that they lack trust, "Not necessarily all true is better

than nothing, better than you watch CCTV, the news on it has been edited". This is a key reason why respondents from Hong Kong are not as keen about government intervention as compared to Taipei even if they too expressed concerns about the lack of professionalism amongst media practitioners. They are experiencing first-hand what government intervention can do to their beloved TVB. A cultural icon which they grow up with is now perceived as becoming the throat and voice of a distant government in Beijing.

### Transparency

In times of crisis, short of implementing martial law and restricting the movement of the people, the most valuable currency would be the credibility of the government and the channels for which the government's messages are disseminated from. Trust in the information disseminated would be vital to managing and overcoming the crisis. Except for Beijing, the responses from the other three cities indicate that they think that their government would not or could not cover up information regarding major public crisis.

While Singapore's government is not exactly a poster boy for transparency, there is still trust that whatever information that is released to public is factually correct. What may differ from the responses and expectations from Hong Kong and Taipei is that some respondents from Singapore think that information might be withheld back for some time so as to allow the government to prepare the necessary resources needed to handle such crisis. Hence, it is not like the cloud of uncertainty that many Chinese people experience.

In China, natural disaster and public health crisis cover-ups are common and almost every respondent mentioned that the numbers of victims are probably under-reported in many instances. (For example, see Li 2017). All of them do not believe the government would be truthful about such information but would still be careful about expressing their doubt. One Beijing respondent explained, *"Anyway I feel that the information released by the government cannot be fully trusted, but can be regarded as having basic reliability, and then can only be said to be basic. And then if it is the flu, if the government says that the infection is not serious, I think the seriousness may possibly may be*

*slightly more, but it also is not too much serious, and then just take precautions on our own, that is, as an ordinary person, maybe can only do this.”*

For some of them, they have given up any hope of knowing the truth. As one Beijing respondent said, *“feel that there is no expectation of personally knowing what the truth of the matter is. In any case, it is just being more careful on our own. For example, the spread of Ebola virus, then you just have to be careful, pay attention to all aspects. For incidents, such as Xinjiang armed assaults kind, you just do not go to those places with many people. Anyway, it is always right to be more careful, also don’t think about the need to know how serious the matter really is, or what the truth really is.”*

However, despite knowing and acknowledging that cover ups happen frequently, a few respondents would still defend that they would trust the information disseminated from the government. One went as far as to argue that it does not make any difference whether it is reported as a thousand victims or more than 10 thousand victims given the number of people in China.

#### Voice and representation

Respondents in China frequently mention internet comments or social media comments as a source of information and think of the comments section as reflection of public opinions. It appears that these internet comments offer an alternative source of information that mainstream media could not provide. It could also be that they see these comments as more authentic since many of these comments could be posted and viewed before censors delete them.

The CCP, it would appear, has however cracked the problem of how to wrest back the control from such diffused communication. The impact of comment systems could only reach their potential when people believe in its authenticity. By flooding the systems with state directed comments, it creates doubt in whether the comments are genuine and it also distracts the public from the issue at hand (King, Pan, Roberts 2017). While many respondents brought up comment systems as sources of

alternative information, these same respondents would also highlight that they are wary about the credibility of such comments and bring up the possibility of the 50-cent party.

As mentioned earlier about “suzhi”, many respondents question the suzhi of “others” and think that many “others” lack the responsibility and ability to think through issues. Even in representing themselves, they question whether “others” are responsible enough, as a Beijing respondent puts it, *“I think we should seek the views of the public, but in the process of seeking public opinion, I think there will not be a lot of people who would treat this matter seriously, maybe they would say their point of view, they would also feel that it is not credible, but still they would say it, it would give those above who are making the decision some difficulties. I feel that Chinese people, well saying their own opinion is just lip service, but they don’t think through seriously, that is, what the outcome would for policies, so it would give a lot of trouble to those decision makers, so some things, if you do not seek the views of the people it is easy to resolve, and if seek the opinions, the thing may just end up not done.”*

A frequent defence that Beijing respondents give for the lack of representation in the media is that there are too many people in China. This uncritical defence could be a result of education in China that is ingrained in Chinese that for a society with so many people, there is no space for individual expressions. However, whether it is a city of 5 million or a country of 1 billion, no media would be able to reflect so many individual views. Representation does not equate to having each and every individual’s views printed. It is simply having sufficient views of a particular issue so that most people would be able to identify with some of the views published. The reality is that for every issue, dominant or significant views are a mere handful, many could even reduce to just 2 sides of a coin. There may be nuances in each view but nobody’s complete nuanced opinion would be reflected in the press.

There might be a tendency to simply think that those in restricted environments are brainwashed and herded around by the government. However, the reality is that the respondents were mostly concerned about getting on with their lives and making the most out of the situation they are

in. Many young Chinese people are also pressured by societal norms that emphasizes on career and family building (Liang, 2017). For the majority of them, this is not a matter of whose voice gets to be heard or represented. This is not the governed fighting against the government, rather each is simply trying to function within the system and keeping the system functioning. While the focus group data has not shown that they are actively supporting the system, there are also no signs that they want to dismantle the system. After all, the system has brought their family and them (middle-class urban youths) considerable progress over the years.

From the responses that indicate their belief that they have very little impact on what the government does, it shows that throughout their lives, these youths have been conditioned to lead their lives around the policies created by the government rather than to change or influence the policies. They think that they are too small and insignificant for the government to pay attention to their voices. Those even further away from the political centre would be even less concerned about these vague concepts of representation or voice. After all, if those at the capital do not believe they have any influence over the government, what influence could those in the other provinces have?

Singaporean respondents tend to privilege elite views. They want expert views that are independent of the government. This privileging of elite views has also affected how respondents view public opinions in that they indicated that there is a lack of NGOs giving views rather than indicating that the average Singaporean's views are not taken into account. "*we still lack certain institutions which reflects the views of the people*". What they want is for someone else to speak for them rather than wanting to speak for themselves. Most think that the government would do whatever they think is right instead of what the people want anyway and thus there is little returns in trying to get their voice heard.

Respondents from Taipei and Hong Kong do think that there is some sort of representation in the media, albeit not their exact thinking, there is usually something close enough. The multitude of media offerings in Hong Kong and Taipei gives the impression of representation of different voices in the cities. However, many would still complain that the voices of people are not heard unless there is a large number of people pushing for it. This demonstrate a common misunderstanding regarding how

representative the media is. The reality is that no media can represent every single unique voice. What is possible is simply being able to represent the majority of dominant voices.

Most respondents from Hong Kong while acknowledging the necessity of voicing their position to the government are unwilling to speak to the media. Unwillingness to speak to the media is not expressed outright but framed as due to fear of being edited into memes, loss of privacy, misrepresentation, lack of knowledge etc. This is likely due to the aversion of being seen as politically active publicly since many of their parents are against it.

There is free rider mentality common in all four cities. Many would acknowledge the necessity of the people in expressing their opinions to the government but many would leave it to be done by other people or other experts. That is, others should express their opinions but they would not. To some extent, it is similar to “stealth democracy” in the USA. As reported in Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), the people in USA are supportive and desire the processes that facilitate participation from the people but are unwilling to do it themselves. There is just too much effort needed.

### Check and Balance

In China’s recent history, various CCP documents and leaders had mentioned about the media playing the role in “public opinions supervision” (see Zhao & Sun 2007), albeit within the confines of relevant rules and under the supervision of the leadership. However, as can be seen from the focus group sessions, this role has obviously not taken root in the society as none of the Beijing respondents mentioned the media playing such a role. Nor does any of the respondents signal the willingness to report malfeasance of government officials to the media. No one thinks that it would be effective and some expressed worries that reporting such matters to media might have possible backlash. According to some of them, reports on corruption in the media are directed by the government itself and it is mainly due to fights between factions within the party. As a respondent describes, *“feel that there are two possibilities out of this, the first one is that it is driven by the government, that is, the government gave the media information or a channel to let the media expose this thing. There is also a possibility*



*that it may be a struggle between factions, one faction would like to undermine the other faction, they can use this way. So most of the domestic media I feel is that they are a government propaganda channel, there is a feeling that the media seems to be still standing on their side more.”*

The view that media serves as a watchdog is not strong in China. It is not common for the public to contact the media to whistleblow on government wrongdoings. Political culture in China is not a culture of checks and balances. It is a culture of accountability (Chien, 2010), in that the government is accountable to the people. Although the system of accountability is not direct as government officials at different levels are answerable to their superiors and then ultimately answerable CCP's top echelons. At the central of CCP, the leadership understands that the CCP has to keep the people satisfied in order to stay in power. The kind of accountability that the CCP offers to the people is that the government is akin to parents being accountable to their children. The education system and the media build and reinforce the paternalistic commitments from the CCP to the people. Similar to how one would view relationships in a family, one does not expect checks and balances in a relationship between parent and child. However, there are expectations of accountability and ensuring that the child's interests are protected to parents' best ability.

For Singapore, the perception of corruption within the government is not high. According to Transparency International's report on perception of corruption, Singapore was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the world in terms of lowest rate of corruption. (For comparison, Hong Kong was ranked 15<sup>th</sup>, Taiwan 31<sup>st</sup> and China 79<sup>th</sup>) Corruption cases are dealt with swiftly and heavily and the few cases of corruption were well reported in the media. Trust that the authorities would be impartial in the issue of corruption is thus high and most indicate that they would choose to report to the relevant government authority rather than the press. Only one respondent out of 12 mentioned that the media should act as a check on the government.

Respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei shares very similar views on the media acting as a check on the government. Most think that the media would expose any wrongdoing within the government. Respondents from both cities also mentioned that the openness of the internet meant that there is no way government can cover up any information. A Taipei respondent pointed out, *“Currently in Taiwan, if the government purposely want to cover up anything, it always ends up being exposed or whistle blown. For example, on PTT there are many examples or some are information that counter the government’s information.”* Respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei would also explicitly point out that the media should have the right and responsibility to inform.

However, Hong Kong respondents show a higher level of trust in the authority as more respondents from Hong Kong mentioned that they would be willing to report to the government authority. Hong Kong’s Independent Commission Against Corruption has a good reputation amongst the Hong Kong people since cleaning up the rampant corruption within the civil service in the 1970’s. This reputation has sustained till now but since the handover, there has been questions on the independence nature of the commission.

#### Views on Dissent

Many would be up in arms arguing that the space for civil/public discourse would be reduced when the state place restrictions on freedom of the press or freedom of speech in general. However, other than the overt restrictions, there are also cultural factors that would reduce public discourse. An important factor would be how the society frame or view disagreements or dissent.

If the mere act of expressing disagreement is frowned upon or has to be carefully couched in a roundabout manner, no one would be expecting these youths to be participating in any protests or demonstrations any time in the future. While there are many instances of street protests in China as observed by researchers (Lee 2007, Perry & Selden 2003), it should be highlighted that many of these are due to workers’ disputes, property ownership conflicts or pollution in their immediate environment. So these are mainly self-interested episodes that are due to local issues and can be contained locally as long as concessions are made by business owners or local governments. These

protests are about enforcements and concessions within the existing governance or legal structure.

There is no intention to agitate for political change. Beyond those self-interested protests, there were also some nationalistic events that are triggered by international events such as the US bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade or territorial disputes regarding islands in the South China Sea. Again, these are not due to dissatisfaction directed at the government and hence do not require the government to change any policy.

While street protests are usually due to self-interests, Yang (2013) observed that there is growing participation in online activism concerning the wider public. The affordance of the internet might allow activists to reach out to a larger number of people but most people are still apathetic about these civil society activities. When respondents were asked whether they would sign online petitions or participate in protests, all they are willing to commit are merely "likes" on posts that might appeal to them. Activism online has not migrate to the physical space. Tracing the numerous times for which university students served as the foundation of protest movements, Perry (2014) noted the lack of campus unrest in China in the last two decades.

The reality is that few protests in China are due to idealistic or political causes that are akin to Hong Kong's protests for universal suffrage or Taiwan's LGBT rights marches. Protests are non-existent in Singapore, let alone merely self-interested. The large-scale protests in Taiwan and Hong Kong are the kinds of protests that require changes in legislation or government policies. These are the kinds of protests that have long term repercussions. This difference is manifested in the focus group data as respondents from different cities expressed different attitude towards signalling disagreement with the government. Taipei and Hong Kong have a stronger protest culture and respondents from these two cities have a more positive attitude towards participation in protests. While not everyone from Hong Kong or Taipei said that they participated in the most recent large scale protest, most indicated some level of support. However, for respondents in Beijing and Singapore, protesters are seen as "creating trouble".

Protests are public display of disagreement or demands for actions. One can have disagreements and still be supported as a leader of a country. You can have protests and still function

and exist as a government. Hong Kong and Taipei have managed to carry on with life despite the frequent street protests. Some protests will no doubt cause inconveniences and at times may even break the law. A healthy protest culture develops the people's understanding of dissent and persuasion as demonstrated by the 2014 protest in Hong Kong. The young protesters understood that they needed the people on their side and even when causing major roads to be shut down, the protesters cleaned up the areas they occupied, set up recycling points, managed distribution of food and water and even gave tuition to the younger protesters. These positive acts amidst disruptions showed a more nuanced view of protests, indicating that protestors know that what they are doing is not just a public display of dissatisfaction but is also to win over the support of the public. Protests are not necessarily subversive. Showing disagreement does not mean wanting to overthrow a government. These protests are as much targeted at the wider public as it is targeted at the government.

*It's not for me, it's for them.*

Many research have shown that most people would think that they are mature enough, responsible enough or have the intellect to handle any kind of information. Rather it is the problems of "other people", who need protection from these negative information that the state needs to set limitations on what kind of information is allowed to be transmitted freely. This is the common theme that exists in all four cities. The respondents think that their fellow citizens can be easily influenced by the media and need to be protected with regulations. This phenomenon is known as the "third-person effect".

First proposed by Davidson (1983), the third-person effect hypothesis describes the situation for which a person thinks that persuasive communication has a greater influence on other people than on himself. Following which, many studies have been done to examine the hypothesis in various dimensions such as different types of content and media users (See Perloff 2009 for review of studies conducted on third person effect). Third person effect was found in both positive (such as public service campaigns discouraging drink-driving) and

negative (such as pornography and violence) content. More pronounced effects were observed in negative content and comparative contexts whereby the description of “others” is more vague and more different from themselves. Third-person effect is generally explained by the general tendency to perceive the self in ways that make the self appear better than others. Other explanations include attributional biasness and the belief and need of self-control.

Third-person effect does not require a restrictive communications environment to take effect. It is simply the manifestation of a form of bias in human nature. Many people tend to have bias when they occupy different position as an actor or an observer in a situation. The reality is that no society allows for the complete unbridled transmission of any and all forms of information. Any country or society would have some level of limitation on the media. Many societies have restrictions according to the locally accepted level of decency/morality and probably all countries, if not all, have restrictions on the spread of information that could harm national security. Some also disallow speeches that may be blasphemous or lese-majesty. Some others protect the general public against the spread of personal private information. The reality is that many forms of limitations exist around the world but the average person would not be aware of these unless they research on it.

How third party effect manifest in the four cities are different according to how restrictive the communications environments are. Beijing and Singapore share similarities while Hong Kong and Taipei are similar. In justifying their controls of information, authoritarian societies tend to be much less specific and much more general in their justification for controls. Both China and Singapore would rely on social harmony as the justification of control. Data from the focus group sessions show how the respondents from Beijing and Singapore have accepted or rationalised the control that they are subjected to. The explanations or rationalisations given by the respondents on why control is needed

correspond with the justifications from the government. Beijing respondents would cite “suzhi”, “guoqing”, too many people and national security while respondents from Singapore would talk about race, religion and national security. For them, their fellow citizens required control from the government lest they become affected by all the negative content that would cause the society to be unstable. Respondents from both stricter cities mentioned about how those with lower level of education and older generations are less critical about information and could be easily influenced. Hence, even as Beijing respondents lament about how the great firewall of China caused them inconveniences, they would still defend such controls. To some extent it is also a remedy to the cognitive dissonance that the participants may be going through. People often have to rationalise within themselves so that they can accept an unpleasant situation. On one hand, they are affected by the censorship, on the other hand, the strong sense of nationalism hinders them from criticising policies. So, they have to tell themselves that it is for the good of “others”.

It may intuitively appear to most that people from freer countries would then be against any form of control. However, responses from Taipei and Hong Kong demonstrate how even for a free environment, there would be people who still want some level of control or regulation. A freewheeling media that races to uncover the latest scandals and panders to the lowest denominator is not what most people want. Free market forces may have spurred the growth of what many deemed as trashy publications, it does not mean that it should be left unfettered. This is an aspect whereby many respondents from both Hong Kong and Taipei think that the government should step in and control. They think that the demand for sensationalistic content by their fellow countrymen is unhealthy and there should be better quality content.

However, as compared to Taipei, only a few respondents from Hong Kong thought that control is needed. Hong Kong does not have as strong a demand for control because

there is a fear of intervention from China. Those who do not think that control is needed would point out that they already feel the interferences in TVB and the increase in pro-China publications. Such resistance towards China's interference makes them more wary of additional government control even if they are unhappy about the sensationalistic and unprofessional media practitioners. The more varied and presence of more international media in Hong Kong as compared to Taipei also meant that there is lesser dissatisfaction over content.

#### 8.4 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to explain why people accepts communications control and why people in freer communications want more control. Third-person effect could explain most of the time why respondents in the four cities support communications control. Many of them think that the rapid changes in society has left a large portion of the population ill-equipped to handle the complex information landscape. Hence, it would be acceptable to have controls even if they themselves are subjected to the controls. Similarly for those in freer communications environment, they think that the excesses and sensationalistic media have to be reined in for the benefit of the public who could not discern quality content.

In the process to better understand how people perceive different forms of communications control, the study also revealed how different forms of control can have different effects on the society and how it would affect the perception of the government. Respondents from both Beijing and Singapore noted how conversations moved on once a topic is no longer reported in the media, highlighting awareness of the agenda-setting function and effect of media control. Beyond agenda-setting effect, the two restrictive societies with different control strategies have produced different outcomes. The focus group data showed that while media may be controlled in both Singapore and Beijing, the effect on the people are quite different due to the due forms of control.

China's media control on the other hand works predominantly on distraction, deletion and blocking. There is ambiguity but there is less fear as compared to Singapore since deletion or blocking would not hurt. Those that truly incur the government's wrath are shunted away from the public's view. Ai Weiwei is better known as the designer for Beijing's national stadium than as a political activist. Liu Xiaobo is well known outside of China but unheard of to the average person in China.

There is a lack of distinction between facts and opinions in the discussion of information in news. Chinese respondents would frequently answer that they will judge for themselves what is right as oppose to what is real. While this frequent theme appears to show that there is some sophistication or scepticism in how they handle information, the inability to elaborate how they would go about critiquing or judging the information beyond the oversimplified "think for ourselves" showed limitations in their information literacy. Although, to be fair, it could also be the lack of credible and independent information sources that impair their ability to be critical about information. When one is in an environment that hinders access to facts, what is left for the average person is merely subjective opinions. So many of them would say they would "add in their own views" when explaining how they differentiate what information they could trust. It would also appear that many of the Chinese respondents mistake their scepticism for critical thinking. Critical thinking would allow evaluation of new information, attempting to understand the information, how the information came about and the arguments supporting the information. Having observed how certain events would result in the mainstream media carrying the exact content, many of the Chinese respondents simply distrust and reject the information from the media have. They know this is due to the CCP's control of the media and when congruence within the media is seen as controlled and fabricated content, difference is then regarded as more real. As one respondent described, "*You just search on the internet, then regardless of which station's*



*news, headline by headline just read all, if they are too similar, those similar content, then maybe would not really read, but if anything that is different, I would read it more earnestly. So that's it."*

The Chinese government may think that it is preventing dissent and protecting the stability of the society but it is also inculcating an unhealthy level of scepticism into the Chinese society. When news lacks credibility, people's sense of scepticism also grows. Critical thinking is also stunted when the government blocks off other independent sources of information. Credible information allows people to make decisions and plans. Lack of which would make people putting off decision making.

The cloud of uncertainty that such a communications environment could create was exemplified by how many Chinese were unsure of what make of information of a major event that could disrupt their daily routine. A Chinese respondent described, *"Previously there was a holiday for 6 days due to APEC, so maybe for the one two days before the school formally notified us, and then we were particularly confused, we just do not know whether there is holiday or not. So some people were spreading the news that there would be holiday then some other people said that the information was a false rumour. At that time, no one knows, cannot tell it apart."*

This is a classic example of what an information deficient environment can do to people. The policy intent and aim would be to have a less crowded city, to ease the public resources and clean up the air with lesser human activities. However, the effects of the policy became less effective because people were unsure about the credibility of the information until the last minute. Plans to leave the city for short holidays could not or would not be made in time. What resulted would be that many people remained in the city. Public transportations

may be less crowded than normal but could have been even less had more people made plans to leave the city.

While the political system does not have much mechanisms for procedural legitimacy and public opinion is not actively and widely sought at the national level, there is still an impression amongst the people that the political leaders do take into account public views in their public policies. Many respondents whom lamented that the government would not listen to them would also indicate that the leaders would probably think of the interests of the people. Although this is not logical, it would appear that the economic progress over the years has been equated as taking care of the people. The ability of the government to have a say in almost anything, possibly except the weather and natural disasters, meant that the people view the government as having the ability to keep the masses satisfied. Injustices may happen to a select few. Those who do not work hard may not get what they want in life. However on the whole, the majority would be satisfied because the people believe that the government would not let bad things happen. Especially any matter that may affect a large number of the people. The people has placed their trust in that the government would ensure that the economy keeps growing. This is cultivating a culture of misplaced responsibility. The people are not responsible in ensuring that they are well informed. The people are not responsible in ensuring that things are done well. The people are not responsible in ensuring that the right people are in positions of power. After all, why should they be responsible when they do not have a say or have any influence in how the government functions. When one is tied up, can the person be responsible for not stopping the wrongdoings happening in front of his eyes? As the people constantly think that the government would be responsible in ensuring that nothing bad would happen, it ultimately creates a moral hazard.

Singapore's communications control works mainly through fear. Fear of misspeaking and fear of repercussions. So the repercussions are immense and widely publicised. Legal

demands and apologies are always made public and reported in the media. There is no secrecy or doubts about the government's willingness to . Perhaps the only ambiguity is the content. Many would say they know where the line is and would not cross it. But in reality, most are giving a wide berth and would not even touch it with a 100-foot pole. Background research conducted for this study through interviews with journalists who had worked in both Singapore and China indicated that it is easier to get people to talk to the media in China than in Singapore. Singaporeans would frequently decline to express views or after expressing their views would indicate unwillingness to be identified by name.

While the calibrated controls by the Singapore government provided more trust in the mainstream media as compared to China, there still is some lingering scepticism. That lingering scepticism could pose a potential problem as Singaporeans continue to see the mainstream media as being partial to the government. As Singaporeans demand for more independent perspective, the perception of a controlled mainstream media could possibly drive Singaporeans towards misinformation simply because those sources serve up different perspectives.

Freedom of expression only refers to the right to speak without government intervention. It does not guarantee that the people would be able to receive diverse and accurate information. Given how participants responded in Hong Kong and Taipei. There is a need to examine communications beyond the over-simplified lens of freedom of expression. The excesses of a free environment that lead to deluge of information, disinformation and misinformation can also cause problems as people would become more sceptical of the information circulating in society. Excessive scepticism is not healthy for a society as demonstrated by the responses from Beijing. If it is so excessive as to create distrust in public institutions and organs of state the government would then be rendered useless. Respondents

from Taipei are experiencing this excessively media which they see more harm than good. Hence, there is this tendency to seek regulations out of this conundrum.

However, the answer to fighting this excessive freedom is not to simply implement state controls. State controls too would create scepticism in the people. Media literacy is thus more important than ever. Promoting freedom of the press or free speech is meaningless if people are sceptical of all the information in circulation. Press freedom may help those working in the industry to function freer or face lesser persecution but the end product of their collective endeavours do not necessarily lead to more trust from or better representation of the public. Coupled with the lowered barrier of entry to create and disseminate content, it is even harder now to discern good quality credible content.

It should also be noted that Taipei respondents demonstrates a moderate level of scepticism that can be healthy. They are sceptical of politicians but they also showed a flexible attitude towards who to support in terms of political party. They demand more information rather than quickly taking a position. While they are critical of their local media in various aspects such as tendency to be sensational, lack of depth and lack of international outlook, the respondents are still of the opinion that the press and internet deters the government from hiding important information.

The argument for a free media environment is that it would allow or encourage the people to discuss and participate in the deliberation of socio-politico issues. Even for those who do not participate in the discussions, they would be exposed to the arguments of the issue from different perspectives. Through such actions, people would then come to better understand the reasons why certain policies are adopted. The open and inclusive process would also imbue in the people positive feelings in the system since they are or can be part of the deliberation process.

This can be observed in the focus group sessions for which most respondents from Taipei do not outright reject the idea of a nuclear power plant but are willing to examine the safety measures and weigh the pros and cons for which the plant may be constructed. The free media environment allows people to know more viewpoints and encourages people to participate in the discussions. As people articulate issues, it makes them think through the issue more coherently. We do not usually think in sentences or linearly but the need to express ourselves pushes us to put ideas into words and sentences and that could modify how we view issues (Pingree 2007).

Chinese respondents however reasoned that their government would simply have considered the feelings of the people and probably would not build a nuclear power plant near the city if the people are against it. Although when pushed to consider what they would do if the government went ahead and build it, they simply acknowledge that there is nothing they could do to change the result and a few indicated that they would simply leave the city if there are safety concerns. Of all the respondents, only Beijing respondents expressed fleeing the city as a possible course of action. Fleeing the city was also mentioned when exploring the scenario on the possible public health crisis. All these point the how the lack of credible information would likely drive the people towards a self-preservation mode and possibly not the social harmony scenario that the Chinese government had intended.

## Chapter 9

### 9.1 Legitimacy and Media Freedom

The government can censor, can direct, can block information but at the end of the day, whether the people believe in the narratives in the mainstream media depends on whether there is resonance between the information transmitted and what the people experience. What the control of information can achieve is at best what a blinker can do, it can focus attention or divert attention but can never completely blindfold the public. Authoritarian governments throughout history had tried to control the flow of information but those regimes would eventually still collapse. If the experiences of the people do not align with the information transmitted then there is no resonance and no matter what the controls are, increasing levels of dissatisfaction would eventually bring about loss of legitimacy for a regime.

The resonance achieved by the Chinese and Singapore government with their citizens have been predominantly based on economic progress. One respondent from Beijing mentioned that they are aware that they are at the “feet of the emperor” and thus many aspects of their life have been well taken care of because Beijing (referring to city leadership) is in the constant sight of the national leaders. However, from the insistence and assurance of 8% annual GDP growth in the 2000’s to the gradual lowering of target growth of 6.5% in 2017, it shows that no country can sustain such high level of economic growth. Hence, legitimacy would eventually have to depend on aspects other than or in addition to economic progress. China is already preparing for the inevitable economic slowdown with the gradual lowering of expectations. There are also signs that China is strengthening its economic data collection and reporting as its leaders know that its infamously inaccurate statistics would not fool people into contentment. In managing the expectations of the people, the CCP would

have to choose between being more open and honest about their policies or carry on blinkering the masses with its information control policies.

Singapore, too, would have to face its own economic challenges and examine whether it could still deliver on performance legitimacy. Once it was the only developed city in Southeast Asia, serving as a launching pad for enterprises to invest into the region. Now other cities in the region have grown in capabilities and may no longer need Singapore to serve as an access node. For Singapore, it is not being more open. Rather it is more about involving and accepting the opinions of the people in policy making. The technocrats that have run the country for half a century generally sees public opinions as noise and would rather have the ability to shut out those noises.

As demonstrated by the data from Taipei and Hong Kong, in freer media environments, the cacophony of voices in general are not beneficial in allowing people to form an impression that their voices are heard. Rather, the competing demands and narratives from different segments of society in freer media environments would only add to the impression that their voices are ignored. Taipei and Hong Kong are not unique in their situations. What we witness in many freer media societies is basically a situation of tragedy of the commons, in varying degrees. Most people in liberal democratic societies would very readily tout support for democracy but at the same time, too many assume that someone (else) would be paying attention to the news/information to keep themselves informed and hold their political leaders accountable. Theiss-Morse and Hibbings (2002) bigheartedly termed this inactive support for democracy as “stealth democracy”, more demanding people might perhaps find it more apt to term such low effort as “free-rider democracy”.

That said however, the freer media environments do create conditions and perceptions that it would be difficult for the government to hide information from them. Hence while they

may harbour some level of scepticism of the government, many would still trust the more critical information disseminated.

## 9.2 Different Challenges

### China

This study might have found that many people accept and has internalised the control of the media but that does not mean that the situation would stay that way. As the reasons for tolerating becomes lesser (e.g. lesser disparity in literacy and perceived societal/national needs), it might be harder to justify the controls.

Depending largely on performance legitimacy would mean that China has to keep up its economic progress. However, economically, China is facing challenges on numerous fronts. Many state-owned enterprises are zombie organisations which are inefficient and unprofitable but kept alive by state funding. Many of these enterprises also have large amount of debts which are not transparent and could possibly expose the finance industry to enormous risks. There is also an overcapacity property market that has built so many new homes that there are numerous ghost cities spread across the country. Despite the apparent oversupply, property prices are still high as most properties are bought and left empty for the purpose of investment. There is a lack of investment options for the large quantity of savings that has accumulated in the masses and thus much of the savings are ploughed into property investments as it is deemed as the safest form of investment.

There have been proclamations about the restructuring of economy to grow domestic demand so as to alleviate the slowing growth (and possibly shrinking) of exports for China. However, restructuring the economy at this point is challenging for China demographically. China has to create employment opportunities for 7 million new graduates annually while manufacturing jobs are moving overseas to less developed countries as wages in China have



become unaffordable for many manufacturers. In addition, the country has an increasing number of old people that the healthcare and social welfare system is inadequate in handling.

In terms of media, It would appear that the CCP has taken a leaf out of Goebbels's playbook in their management of the media. A quote that is attributed to Joseph Goebbels, "what you need to control a media system is ostensible diversity that conceals actual uniformity" sums up the strategy of the Chinese government. Taking advantage of its massive consumer market, China is able to shut out the rest of the world without antagonising most of its own people, for now. The China market is so big and significant that technology companies are bending over backwards to satisfy the demands of the government. Microsoft even created special operating systems just for the Chinese government. Most Chinese know about Google and Facebook but are not upset to be blocked from using those services and are happy to use the homegrown equivalent services Baidu and Wechat. This is also reflected in the survey done by this study. When asked to state three most used/visited mobile App or websites, respondents in Beijing all gave Chinese based services while the other three cities predominantly gave the examples of Facebook, Instagram, Google, etc that are more widely used worldwide. However, whether the Chinese people would continue to accept the walled-off media in the long run is uncertain. China already has a very vibrant user generated content industry whereby many independent content producers are supported by widely used mobile payment services. It will be a struggle even for the CCP's massive army of censors to control these independent content producers and the high demand of alternative media content could signal that people want content that is not regulated closely. Controlling might be increasingly difficult but what direction such controls would proceed depends on whether technology can keep up with the demands as the CCP increasingly depends on artificial intelligence to aid in its information control regime.

## Hong Kong

The transitioning political landscape of Hong Kong poses a great challenge for both the people and the government. Given the years of relatively ample civil liberties, the people of Hong Kong would not be willing to cede freedom to the government easily. However, there are also many who think that they are politically impotent as the Hong Kong government answers to the government in Beijing rather than the people of Hong Kong. The tension is already showing with the widespread and sustained protests in 2014 and the eventual dissipation of the protests. While the government would not be able to restrict civil liberties easily or overtly, there would still be attempts to encroach on and gradually restrict through salami slicing. After all, the 1 country 2 systems pledge was for only 50 years and there is no possibility that Hong Kong can be independent from China. 20 years of hands-off approach had already shown the Chinese government that the people of Hong Kong are becoming more different rather growing closer to China. Thus the Chinese government would want be more assertive in assimilating the 8 million Hong Kong people to be closer to the Chinese system.

As Hong Kong undergoes the transition period, there would be tensions and pushbacks from various segments of the society. Particularly amongst the younger generations who are more politically active than the older generation, there would be more demands for more transparency and participation in the political processes. The media would probably continue to be a highly contentious space for Hong Kong and attempts to tame it would likely carry on and grow to be increasingly stricter.

## Singapore

Singapore, like China, is able to sustain the one-party rule largely due to its performance legitimacy. The main challenge thus would be also the ability to keep its economy growing and unemployment low. As a small market without natural resources and

insignificant manufacturing sector, Singapore is susceptible to global economic cycles. The Singapore government had been able to mitigate these cycles through controls of foreign labour as a large proportion of labour force consist foreigners. This dependence on foreign labour however has also caused resentment to grow as some think that they are being replaced by foreign labour. Balancing this issue would be important in keeping dissatisfaction levels down.

In terms of media, the local media industry is anaemic and appears to have a declining readership/viewership over the years. Some in Singapore have the perception that the mainstream media is biased and hence seek out alternative sources on the internet. This has resulted in the government attempting to regulate online media outlets that are based in Singapore. The growth of more online media outlets reflects the desire for more varied voices and opportunities to voice opinions in recent years. There has been more contestation of ideas in various issues in recent years and how to handle this growth in dissenting voices would be the main challenge for the Singapore government. However, relatively speaking, the scale and proportion of nonconforming voices is still very low as compared to other cities compared in this study.

#### Taiwan

The main challenge for Taipei and Taiwan as a whole is that it is being choked by the Chinese government on the international arena. As Taiwan loses more diplomatic ties and shut out of international organisations, it would be harder for the domestic media to have more of an international outlook as demanded by some focus group respondents from Taipei.

The actions of the Chinese government, however, would more likely result in push back by many people in Taiwan. Taiwan already has a national identity of its own and most Taiwanese do not see their political values in alignment with the mainland. While they know that their political scene is chaotic and at times corrupted, the liberal and open nature of it still

offer them assurance that it would be better than an authoritarian government. Having experienced an extended period of martial law during the “White Terror” era, the people of Taiwan would be averse towards governments with such strong-arm tactics. The example of how the mainland government encroached on the local government in Hong Kong would more likely convince that such one country many systems would not work for the people of Taiwan.

The choke on economic relations is causing a larger impact than diplomatic ties. Taiwan has been going through an extended period of slow growth and stagnant wages. Tourism receipts from China and export trade to China has fallen drastically since the election of Tsai Ing Wen in 2016. This creates a tension between those who are wary of China’s encroachment on Taiwan’s independence and those who think that their livelihood has been hampered by cross straits politics. The ability of the government in mitigating the economic sway from China while balancing a vocal and critical domestic populace would be the main challenge facing Taiwan.

### 9.3 Civic Responsibility

The responses from Beijing and Singapore appear to suggest that people in authoritarian system expect the government to be responsible for most matters in society. Other than for matters that pertain to their private lives, everything else would fall under the responsibility of the government. Be it provision of public services and goods or how much social welfare the country should provide or what sectors in the economy require governmental support or whether more resources should be allocated to protect the environment, all these are the government’s responsibilities. After all, since there is a lack of process for which the people could be involved in the policy formulation, the people would

not be able to involve themselves in the policy formulation even if they have any opinions about the issues.

The complex challenges faced by the countries, however, mean that there need to be a shift in perception of responsibility if stability is desired. Many aspects in governance are interdependent and create repercussions that require trade-offs. Given also that information is more readily available and accessible in this digital age, there would be more comparisons with what and how other countries are doing and have achieved. This then give more impetus for the people to be critical of policies and dissatisfaction to manifest. However, if policies are crafted with input from the people, public consultations if done well would mean that there is a sense of shared responsibility.

Responses from Taipei and Hong Kong however do not demonstrate overt sentiments that the government would take care of matters. They may lament or grumble about the shortcomings of government but would also highlight the need for the people to be involved in policy making. The respondents from these 2 societies do not simply expect the government to solve their problems. Rather it is more about having the government listen to them more. Thus, there seems to be a shift in perception of who should bear responsibility or where the burden lies in terms of how well run the country is. While the responses from Taipei and Hong Kong do not indicate the respondents think that the people are fully responsible and so deserves the government that they have, there is also no indication that they expect the government to be fully responsible for preventing anything negative from happening. The shift in perception could have been due to the differences in political context in that there are expectations of the people to participate in policy formulation and there are processes in existence to allow for the people to provide input.

The difference in attitude could also be due to differences in civic education in the different societies. This would be an area for which further research could be conducted.

## 9.4 Scepticism

This study found that many respondents exhibit some level of scepticism during the focus group sessions. However, the level and the target of scepticism is different. Scepticism needs to be examined further rather than taken at face value. Scepticism could either be constructive or destructive depending on how it manifests.

Scepticism has taken on a negative image in recent years and to many people, scepticism equates to denial. This is especially so in areas that have been heavily backed up by science such as climate change and vaccine safety. Or it could be events based such as holocaust sceptics or 911 sceptics. All these examples suggest that sceptics are conspiracy theorists who are irrational. There may be some emotional and irrational segments of the public that has hijacked the meaning of scepticism but just because some had used the word and concept negatively does not necessarily mean that scepticism is all bad.

Moderate and healthy level of scepticism can exist. At the individual level, moderate level of scepticism can be a sign of a thinking and independent mind. Those who do not trust information easily and would always verify information given are also sceptics. However, at healthy level, these sceptics are open-minded and are willing to be convinced to particular perspectives as long as the evidence supports the position. Doubts may exist but constructive scepticism would drive people to seek out information so as to clarify the doubts. Sceptics who question rationally would also allow them to think about issues from more perspectives and more coherently.

As explained by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), people demand for those processes in democracy because they do not want to be taken advantage by those in power. As long as there are check and balance mechanisms, most people are generally willing to just coast along without paying much attention to what the government is doing. Most people do

not want to be involved in policy making process and are happy to turn over the decision to empathetic non-self-interested people. They care about the process but have no interest in being part of the process, thus making it stealth democracy rather than participatory democracy. This shows that scepticism is integral to procedural legitimacy since it is this scepticism of those in power that creates a demand for processes that aid in procedural legitimacy.

The problem is that check and balance mechanisms is not reflected in level of trust and support of system. Systems that emphasizes on check and balances would inherently have more scepticism and lower level of support as democracy encourages people to be more critical of the government. Scepticism can be constructive as it is a form of feedback. When there is scepticism over a policy, it meant that it may not have been well-thought out or scepticisms may reveal the unintended consequences of a policy. Moderate scepticism also contributes to checks and balances when people question who actually benefits from policies implemented. It pushes government to be more transparent in their actions. It also indicates that more work and stronger evidence is needed to convince those small pockets of people. It demands policies to be backed up by evidence While it lowers support, it also mitigates against system collapse. The legitimization crisis that democratic societies faced is perhaps more of feature that pushes those in power towards constant review of policies and processes.

Unhealthy scepticism would result when people doubt the government or information but have no other credible avenues to verify their information. In these cases (as exhibited by respondents from Beijing), they would just go along with the doubts and then make the best of what they could possibly do in their best interest. Just as in game theory whereby people without information would assume that others would pick the option that is best for themselves and thus they would reciprocate with the same. Even if there might be options

that may result in a better overall outcome for all, the lack of communication and information hinders cooperation or community sentiments.

Extreme sceptics are suspicious of mainstream information and doubt even the most widely accepted opinions. However, everyone needs information to function in the world. So extreme sceptics find information that fits their world view rather than change their views to fit widely accepted information. For example, a climate change sceptic doubting that global temperature rise is due to air pollution from human activities would find that temperature rise is due to natural long term fluctuations make more sense to them. These sceptics might then find the explanation of long term natural fluctuation allows them to carry on with their normal activities without any cognitive dissonance. Extreme scepticism at the individual level probably is probably harmless. Refusal to accept scientific information or any information that is properly sourced and well backed up probably would not affect the life of any one person much. For some other issues, scepticism adds up to harm the population. In the case of vaccination sceptics, as more people refuse to accept vaccination, the protection from herd immunity drops and diseases that had been previously eradicated might return. The population as whole then suffers because of a growing number of sceptics. This too applies in policy making. When there are too many people holding extreme sceptic views, it impairs fair assessment of policies and paralyses decision making in governance. Everything becomes an opinion, resulting in no common ground for which to base arguments and justifications.

Press freedom is a value for which many in the West wants to spread as a universal value. However, press freedom in its basest form without professionalism from media practitioners is not going to be attractive to many people. If an unbridled press breeds more scepticism than is needed to keep a government in check, if the press disseminates more lies than facts, if the media confuses rather than inform, then people would question whether the



benefits of press freedom are really as what liberal theorists tout them to be. Thus, there need to be emphasis on cultivating a responsible media while preaching about press freedom.

So what is a healthy level of scepticism? The level of scepticism should be one that pushes the state to engage with the people and the people are willing to be engaged rather than outright rejecting whatever claims that the government may make. This mirrors the mutually justifiable values element of Beetham's legitimacy theory. This can be seen in Taipei's focus group data whereby the respondents exhibited a healthy level of scepticism. When responding to questions concerning "not in my backyard" scenario, many said that they need more information and evidence before coming into any conclusion. When asked about whether young people in general are more supportive of any particular political party, they indicated that they generally would support based on past actions and manifesto rather than based on party loyalty.

Destructive scepticism may not just be due to individuals. It could be problems that exist within the structure of the society. For example, for Hong Kong and the demand for universal suffrage, the political system extends beyond the control of the Hong Kong government creating a situation whereby people doubt any form of real progress can take place. The system creates the feeling of helplessness and scepticism that the Hong Kong government would be able to act on their wishes.

In China, when what is reported in the news regularly do not tally with what they experienced, scepticism would grow. People assess the government based on their personal experience instead of perusing through rims of policy papers and legislations. Personal experiences would be affected by people in their social circles and the media. If the media and what they feel and what they hear from their social circles are not aligned, then their level of scepticism would increase.

It may seem that authoritarianism has a monopoly on scepticism but democracy does not prevent the growth of destructive scepticism. The playing up of identity politics and fuelling of emotions to the point of irrational rejection of any policy in India and the USA, is about as destructive as any form of scepticism can get. Irresponsible media that publish misleading stories would also create scepticism amongst the people. Hence, there is a need to emphasize on civic responsibility and a responsible press rather than simply freedom of expression.

### 9.5 Way Forward

A nation with people that bothers and questions is better than a nation with people that do not care. Depending solely on performance legitimacy is hoping and depending on a constantly clean and competent leadership to be in power. It is about as effective as hoping that one never gets stricken by any major illness. Checks and balances that is carried by the people are akin to the insurance that people buys to prepare for unfortunate events. One does not hope that it would happen but the constant effort in payment prevents life from turning into a hopeless situation when any crisis happens. While the data suggests that people do not necessary make the effort to keep themselves informed or participate in the processes when given the chance, a freer media do help give assurance that government would not hide matters from them. Thus, what is needed is to enhance the environment for people in having more confidence in the information.

The way forward would not be to blindly champion for a freer press or simply freedom of speech. Free speech is frequently compared with the free market but free market is not an anarchy. In a free market, people still have expectations of fairness, interpersonal responsibility and some forms of adjudication when disagreements arise. Institutions and norms are developed to support a free market. Totally unfettered speech without personal responsibility is anarchy. Rather the entire ecosystem of information needs to be strengthened

with trust. First off would be educating information consumers. There need to be better media literacy amongst the people. However, information/media literacy across cultural and political contexts are viewed differently. A limitation of media literacy would be that there would be biases according to where it is taught. The main tool of media literacy is to be able to compare and critique sources and content. Educators in the UK may give the examples of the BBC or The Guardian as credible sources while those in the USA might point out the New York Times or the Washington Post. The choice of examples may appear to be fair and partial to bastions of good journalism but this also reflects the biases of different societies. Educators in China and Singapore may teach the same concepts of critiquing the sources and comparing reports but their examples could not entirely be made up of foreign sources. The society may teach media literacy and the people may be increasingly media savvy, but for media literacy to be effective, there has to be sufficient sources that are widely perceived to be independent and trustworthy. Hence while general ideas of media literacy are imparted, biases would also naturally be imbued since information sources within a community affects how effective one can critique sources and content. This limitation can be observed in the focus group data as respondents from Beijing struggle to give examples on what they think are credible sources of news.

This thus brings us to a second point of having independent sources in the system that the people have confidence in. The public service media outlets in many countries offer some insight to public funded independent media outlets. The key point is to allow the editorial team the independence and leeway to report fairly and accurately. Media outlets that are funded by charity trusts, for example The Guardian, could also be a way forward as this allow the media to function without having to bow to commercial interests. Both Singapore and China could possibly heave off their main media organisations from governmental control

and allow independent boards to appoint editorial teams so as to give the media outlets more independence and credibility.

Having these independent media sources would not be sufficient as people can still be sceptical about whether the media outlets are truly independent. There need to be other sources of information that are independent of government and media commercial influences that are able to fact check and keep media outlets accountable for their reporting. Non-profits and academic institutions could possibly provide such alternative sources of information to keep media practitioners on their toes. Media practitioners constantly struggle with “getting it right or getting it first” as they compete for eyeballs. In this era of instant news, there need to be outlets that emphasize on getting facts right over getting news first.

Finally, for all the NGOs who are fighting for media freedom, how they could help the media would be to champion for higher levels of professionalism in the media. Only when the people have more confidence in media that are operating in freer media environment would there be more pressure and incentive for the authoritarian governments to loosen control over the media. When media professionals sensationalise or do not do their due diligence in reporting, it would only serve as examples for governments to carry on their control of the media.

## 9.6 Future Research

The limitation of political comparison is that it would not be possible to make any causation conclusions. However, the similarities between each of the case studies would help point to possible relationships to be studied further. For one, scepticism towards information in restrictive environments could be research in finer details. There are surveys that indicate high trust in the media for China but the focus group data does not agree with those survey findings.

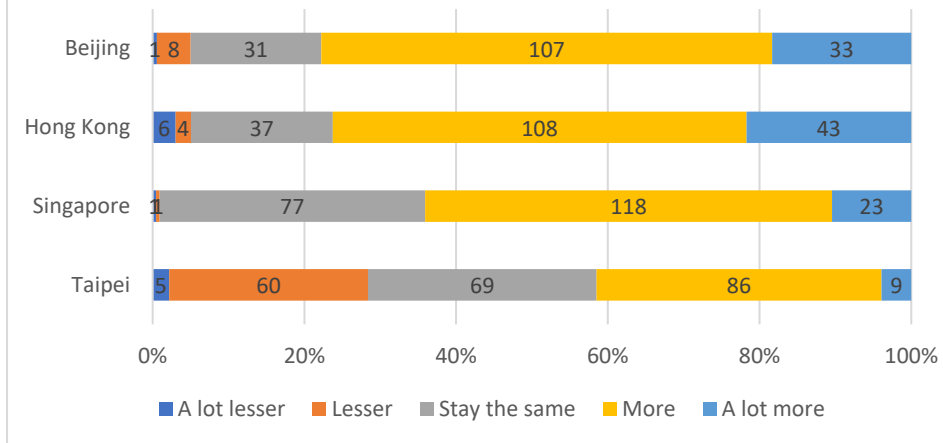
This study is limited by resources and hence had to limit the study to just university students. Expanding the study to include other generations could reveal more about perspectives that may be different across generations. In order to better understand media control's impact on procedural legitimacy, the survey could be expanded to include items that explore willingness to change their mind for controversial issues. The focus group data surfaced the possibility that respondents from Hong Kong and Taipei were more willing to consider different angles for a particular controversial issue while those from Beijing and Singapore were quicker to settle on a particular viewpoint. Hence investigating this aspect with a survey could provide the possibility to generalization.

## Tables & Figures

Country	Press/ Media Freedom		Internet Freedom		
	Reporters Without Borders	Freedom House	Reporters Without Borders	Freedom House	OpenNet Initiative
China	Very Serious Rank = 174	Not Free Score=85	Enemy of the Internet	Not Free Score=83	Pervasive Filtering
Singapore	Difficult Rank=135	Not Free Score=68	Not included in report	Not included in report	No evidence of Filtering
Hong Kong	Noticeable Problems Rank=54	Partly Free Score=32	Not included in report	Not included in report	Reported as part of China
Taiwan	Satisfactory Rank=45	Free Score=25	Not included in report	Not included in report	Not included in report

Table 1. Summary of media control in the four countries

Figure 1. Do you think the media should have less freedom, more freedom or stay the same?



**Table 3.1 Demographics of survey respondents**

		Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
Number of respondents		182	198	220	230
Gender	Male	82	86	98	76
	Female	100	112	122	154
Age	Mean (Range)	21.3 (19-26)	21.9 (19-26)	22.6 (19-27)	20.8 (17-27)



**Table 3.2 Means and standard deviation for survey questions**

	Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
Perception of legitimacy of political system (3 items)	10.265 (2.482)	7.965 (2.001)	10.763 (2.163)	8.197 (2.382)
How would you rate the overall economic condition of the country today	3.58 (0.924)	2.99 (0.740)	3.95 (0.856)	2.46 (0.934)
How do you rate the economic situation of your family today	3.27 (0.822)	2.94 (0.623)	3.24 (0.730)	3.11 (0.856)
How often do you discuss social/political issues online/with your family or friends (2 items)	5.02 (1.947)	5.24 (1.678)	4.59 (1.851)	4.44 (2.016)
How interested would you say you are in politics	2.90 (1.120)	2.79 (0.987)	2.45 (1.183)	2.57 (1.278)
People like me don't have any influence over what the government does	3.45 (1.095)	3.07 (0.998)	3.40 (0.967)	2.85 (1.123)
Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions	2.45 (0.931)	2.20 (0.966)	2.73 (0.992)	1.90 (0.966)
For the sake of national interest, individual interest can be sacrificed	3.09 (1.058)	2.63 (0.919)	2.98 (1.031)	2.64 (0.979)
How much freedom do you think the newspapers/television stations have (2 items)	5.10 (1.811)	6.26 (1.628)	5.17 (1.710)	7.60 (1.889)
How well do you think the media represent the views of people like yourself	2.65 (0.874)	2.76 (0.748)	2.75 (0.846)	2.53 (1.024)
I think it is important for the media to be free to publish news without government control	3.31 (1.144)	4.06 (0.946)	3.19 (0.982)	3.95 (1.115)
People are free to speak what they think without fear	2.72 (1.074)	3.33 (0.966)	2.70 (0.913)	3.75 (1.087)

**Table 3.3 Percentage of respondents who choose more freedom for questions pertaining to freedom of expression**

	Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
I think it is important for the media to be free to publish news without government control	41.8	74.2	41.4	69.4
The media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control VS The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it thinks will be politically destabilising	37.9	66.7	36.8	60.0
People should have the right to read whatever is on the internet VS The government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the internet	61.5	73.2	51.4	82.6
The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society	30.8	46.0	30.9	45.4

**Table 3.4 Regression predicting perception of legitimacy of political system in four cities**

	Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
Gender	-.044 (.398)	.091 (.238)	.145* (.246)	.025 (.327)
Age	-.043 (.163)	-.029 (.086)	.072 (.081)	.089 (.099)
Household income	-.042 (.024)	-.098 (.095)	.006 (.010)	-.031 (.009)
Assessment of country's economic condition	.291** (.234)	.054 (.175)	.344*** (.142)	.144* (.181)
Assessment of family's economic condition	.027 (.281)	.011 (.218)	.084 (.164)	-.030 (.194)
Frequency of political talk	-.033 (.106)	.012 (.075)	-.071 (.062)	-.044 (.080)
Political interest	.029 (.178)	-.190** (.127)	.068 (.108)	-.121 (.128)
Political efficacy	.118 (.174)	.206** (.123)	.007 (.122)	-.064 (.135)
Authoritarian orientation	-.067 (.220)	.271*** (.152)	.243*** (.126)	.196** (.171)
Individualism/Collectivism orientation	.051 (.195)	.176** (.137)	.094 (.118)	.009 (.161)
Assessment of media freedom	.096 (.117)	.167* (.087)	.155* (.076)	-.148* (.087)
Assessment of representation in media	.001 (.221)	.169* (.176)	.071 (.143)	.228** (.152)
Preference of media freedom	-.273*** (.166)	-.015 (.140)	-.053 (.122)	.049 (.144)
Assessment of freedom of speech	.204* (.188)	.038 (.134)	.126* (.143)	.169** (.140)
N	182	198	220	230
R Square	.293	.409	.517	.191
Adjusted R Square	.224	.364	.483	.137

\*p &lt; 0.05; \*\*p &lt; 0.01; \*\*\*p &lt; 0.001.

**Table 4.1 Mean and SD of Survey**

	Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
How much freedom do you think the newspapers/television stations have (2 items)	5.10 (1.811)	6.26 (1.628)	5.17 (1.710)	7.60 (1.889)
I think it is important for the media to be free to publish news without government control	3.31 (1.144)	4.06 (0.946)	3.19 (0.982)	3.95 (1.115)
People are free to speak what they think without fear	2.72 (1.074)	3.33 (0.966)	2.70 (0.913)	3.75 (1.087)
The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society	2.99 (1.033)	2.66 (1.077)	2.95 (1.019)	2.70 (1.181)
The media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control / The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it thinks will be politically destabilising	2.88 (1.183)	2.07 (1.118)	2.86 (1.083)	2.35 (1.153)
People should have the right to read whatever is on the internet / Government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet	2.35 (1.183)	1.99 (1.071)	2.48 (1.062)	1.65 (1.062)
Do you think the media should have more freedom, less freedom or the same amount of freedom	3.91 (0.760)	3.90 (0.867)	3.73 (0.666)	3.15 (0.929)
Do you think the people should have more freedom, less freedom, or the same amount of freedom over what they can access on the internet	3.99 (0.777)	3.82 (0.821)	3.68 (0.701)	3.37 (0.660)

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**Table 4.2 Percentage of respondents choosing lesser or a lot lesser**

	Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
Do you think the media should have more freedom, less freedom or the same amount of freedom	5.0	5.1	0.9	28.4
Do you think the people should have more freedom, less freedom, or the same amount of freedom over what they can access on the internet	2.8	3.0	1.8	3.5

**Table 4.3 Participants Characteristics**

	Beijing	Hong Kong	Singapore	Taipei
Total recorded time	5:25:09	4:34:08	3:53:00	3:57:41
Total respondents	18	12	12	11
Male/Female	8/10	9/3	6/6	6/5
Age range	19-21	19-23	20-25	18-24

**Table 4.4**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Beijing</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>Taipei</b>
Apathy or Defensive of self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most indicate no interest in politics</li> <li>- Many mention that self-interests comes first</li> <li>- Talk about fleeing Beijing if anything drastic happens</li> <li>- “We are only students, who are we to comment on such things”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Think that others are not willing to express their opinions as well</li> <li>- Some indicated that their family are not supportive of participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many indicated no interest in politics</li> <li>- Pins it on possible consequences as seen from defamation cases</li> <li>- “As students, it don’t really bothers us”/ “not something people our age really concerned with”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some think that people are less apathetic now</li> <li>- Some still indicate that if it does not concern them, then there is no point in doing anything</li> </ul>
Willingness to discuss politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some respondents mention applying “mosaic” effect on their face before commenting. This shows the idea that what one says tie strongly to their identity.</li> <li>- Think that safer to speak to local media than foreign media as local media would edit out any inappropriate comments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cautious about getting into conflicts due to differences in viewpoints. So many would rather avoid talking about politics</li> <li>- Many are unwilling to speak to the media. Unwillingness to speak to media is not expressed outright but framed as due to fear of being edited into mimes, loss of privacy, misrepresentation, lack of knowledge etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tend to be hesitant in the willingness to be interviewed by media. Many explain that they need to be really prepared or because the likelihood of being misrepresented is high.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Polarisation of opinions causing some people to be less willing to express political views.</li> <li>- Seems to be more willing to discuss specific issues rather than party politics</li> <li>- Many indicated that there is a generational divide, with older generation more inclined towards party loyalty</li> </ul>
Views on dissent/protest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most view participating in protests negatively, see protests as “creating trouble”</li> <li>- Most think that “liking” social media posts are the most they would do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mixed views on protest</li> <li>- Some would participate but others think that it is not useful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most view participating in protests negatively</li> <li>- Most think that signing online petition or “liking” social media posts are the most they would do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most indicate willingness to participate if the cause is what they believe in</li> </ul>

**Table 4.5**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Beijing</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>Taipei</b>
Views on Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High confidence in the government</li> <li>- Most think that the government is constrain by the large population, of which a large portion still lacks education</li> <li>- Some think that the government would still take into account the opinions of the people even if there are no direct public consultations</li> <li>- Conflicted views as many think that government would just do whatever they think is right but at the same time would think that the government would into account the public's sentiments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confidence in the civil service is still high but appears to be eroding</li> <li>- Acknowledges that the Hong Kong government is constrained by the CCP. So even if the people expressed their views and opinions, the HK government may not be able to carry it out due to the CCP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generally positive views on the government</li> <li>- Many think that life is good and no change is needed</li> <li>- Most think that the government would do whatever they think is right instead of what the people want</li> <li>- Most think that public consultations are merely going through the motion as the government would just do what they had planned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mixed views, many emphasize that it is dependent on the person in office rather than the party</li> <li>- Many are aware about the various forms of public consultations and think that those have some impact on government policies</li> <li>- Many indicated that diversity in views also mean that not all opinions would be heeded</li> </ul>
Views on existing media system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most are sceptical of the credibility of information in mainstream media, preferring to rely on information from "friends around me"</li> <li>- Think that mainstream media like CCTV is too positive</li> <li>- Tend to mention "Phoenix TV" as example of media that present alternative views</li> <li>- Tend to have a negative impression of foreign media, as many think that foreign media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No one expects media to be balanced</li> <li>- Many respondents indicate displeasure at the changes they can observe with TVB</li> <li>- Even if mainstream media has low credibility, respondents indicate that they still have to depend on media for information, especially local information.</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tend to mention "Yahoo Singapore" as example of alternative media that is not government controlled</li> <li>- Shows awareness of alternative information sources but also indicate lack of trust in those sources</li> <li>- Generally trust that the mainstream media is accurate</li> <li>- Think that for reports relating to politics, the mainstream media is biased, portraying the PAP more positively while</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generally critical of media system as being too free and lacks depth</li> <li>- Many think that the media is too inward looking, most focuses on domestic matters</li> <li>- Many think that media companies would pander to the most basic tastes.</li> <li>- Many would still turn to local media for information</li> <li>- High level of trust in PTT (online forums)</li> </ul>

	intentionally portray China negatively		being less fair to opposition parties.	
Views on controls/influences on the media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflicted sentiments amongst the respondents, on one hand they want to portray that the government is credible but on the other hand they know that there are many misinformation out there. So questions addressing the same issue but asked differently or repeatedly could get different responses.</li> <li>- Some would express frustration over controlled media and supportive of freer media at the beginning but as the session proceeds on, they slowly come round to defending the government once it appears that the conversation frequently puts the government in negative light.</li> <li>- Most think that there is room for more freedom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Views are mixed. Some think that control is getting worst, some don't think so because there is no way to hide in this internet age.</li> <li>- Generally disturbed by the influences from mainland China</li> <li>- Shows understanding of the links between commercial, readers, government and publisher.</li> <li>- Feels conflicted that government intervention needed against invasion of privacy invasion by the media and misinformation; however government intervention would mean a lack of independence.</li> <li>- Do not agree with the argument that control is needed for social stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shows knowledge that the government has much influence over the local media</li> <li>- Most indicate that the internet allows them unfettered access to information even if the mainstream media is under government control</li> <li>- Some are surprised about the low ranking in media freedom and think that it should not be that low</li> <li>- Most think that there should be more media freedom</li> <li>- The prosecution of internet users for comments made have a chilling effect on some</li> <li>- Think that the media control in Singapore is not as bad as the control in China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When asked whether they think that the media is being controlled, some expressed a sense of puzzlement. Need to clarify control what or by whom. Others show nuanced understanding of financial influence in media industry.</li> <li>- Would not think that censoring occurs on the internet. Most think that more likely technical error or mistake in reporting if anything gets deleted</li> <li>- Some mused about how some regulations and processes should be introduced to keep the media responsible and less sensationalistic</li> </ul>



**Table 4.6**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Beijing</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>Taipei</b>
Transparency (Possibility of cover-ups)	- Most think that the government would cover up serious disasters. Some think it would just be covering up the extent or seriousness	- Most think that the government would not cover up serious disasters	- Most think that the government would not be able to cover up any serious disaster. However, some think that the government would manage the release of information to manage public reactions	- Most think that the government would not be able to cover up any serious disaster because the media would expose any cover ups
Voice and representation	- Most think that media would represent the views of the government. - Most think that only positive views are reflected - Some think that comments sections are more representative of public opinion - Think that media should just be an independent source of information - Tend to say that media cannot be representative of the public's views because there are so many people in China	- Mixed views on representation in the media - Some mention that internet are better at representing views of the public	- Most think that media represent the views of the government - Most think that only positive views are reflected - Think that media should just be an independent source of information - Show awareness of the agenda setting role that the media play - None mention about media being voice of the people, rather a few mentioned that there should be more experts that are independent	- Mixed views on representation in the media - Many think that need to have many in public making noise before the media would report - Many think that the media represent their own company's viewpoints
Check and balance role	- Most are unwilling to whistle-blow - Most do not think that reporting to the media would be effective - Most believe that any report on corruption is because it is directed/allowed by government	- Most would choose to report to authority than media - Strong sense that media should act as fourth estate - Think that media should expose wrongdoings	- Some are willing to report to authority while some are apprehensive - Most do not think that media is appropriate	- Most are willing to whistle-blow - Variety of avenues indicated (local media, internet forum, authority) - Strong sense that media should act as fourth estate

			- Only one mentioned about media acting as a check on government	- Think that media would expose wrongdoings
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